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ARGOSY

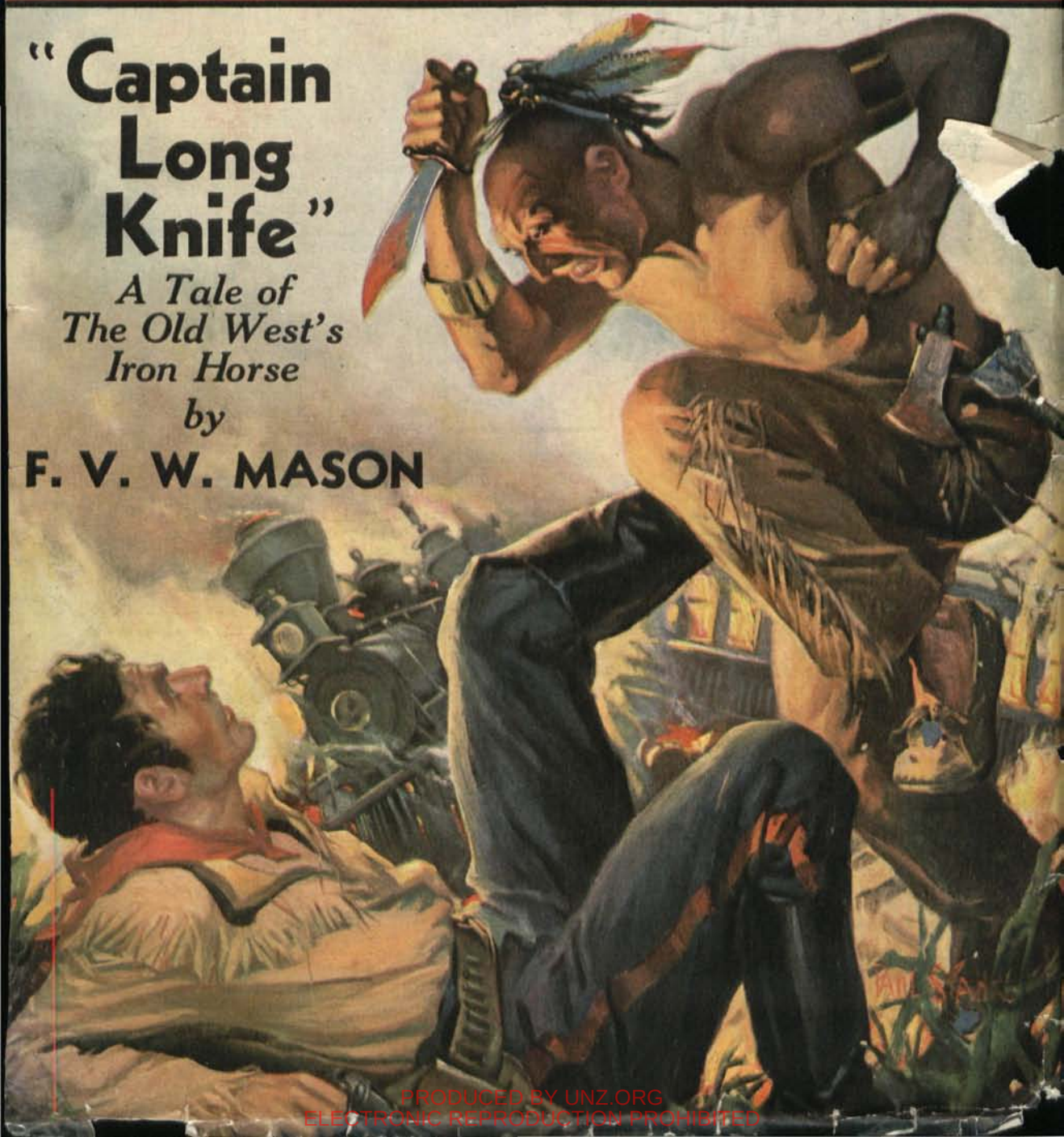
DEC. 29 WEEKLY

"Captain Long Knife"

A Tale of The Old West's Iron Horse

by

F. V. W. MASON



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Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 252 CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 29, 1934 Number 3

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

The Rollers (Novelette—Complete) . . . . Murray Leinster 36
The scourge of synthetic tornadoes

The Sacred Sword (Novelette—Complete) . . . . Tom Curry 67
A mysterious quest on Devil's Island

The Emperor's Agent (Short Story) . . . . . Ared White 106
Napoleon's spy at Austerlitz

Men of Daring (True Story in Pictures) . . . . . Stookie Allen 118
Capt. Arthur La Roe, war-time surgeon

The Hounding Minstrel (Short Story) . . . . Charles Haven 135
Torture-music affects an outlaw's conscience

SERIALS

Captain Long Knife (Six Parts—Part I) . . . . F. V. W. Mason 2
Fighting Indians to span the continent with steel

Masquerade (Five Parts—Part II) . . . . . Fred MacIsaac 84
An impostor's daring scheme for millions

A Grave Must Be Deep! (Six Parts—Part V) . . Theodore Roscoe 120
Haitian voodoo guards a dangerous legacy

OTHER FEATURES

Stranger Than Fiction . . . . . John S. Stuart 134
Curious facts that will surprise you

Claiming the Sea . . . . . J. W. Holden 66

Plant Racketeers . . . . . Delos White 83

Sea-Going Skeletons . . . . . G. R. Johnston 141

The Men Who Make the Argosy—Tom Curry 142

Argonotes 143

Looking Ahead! 144

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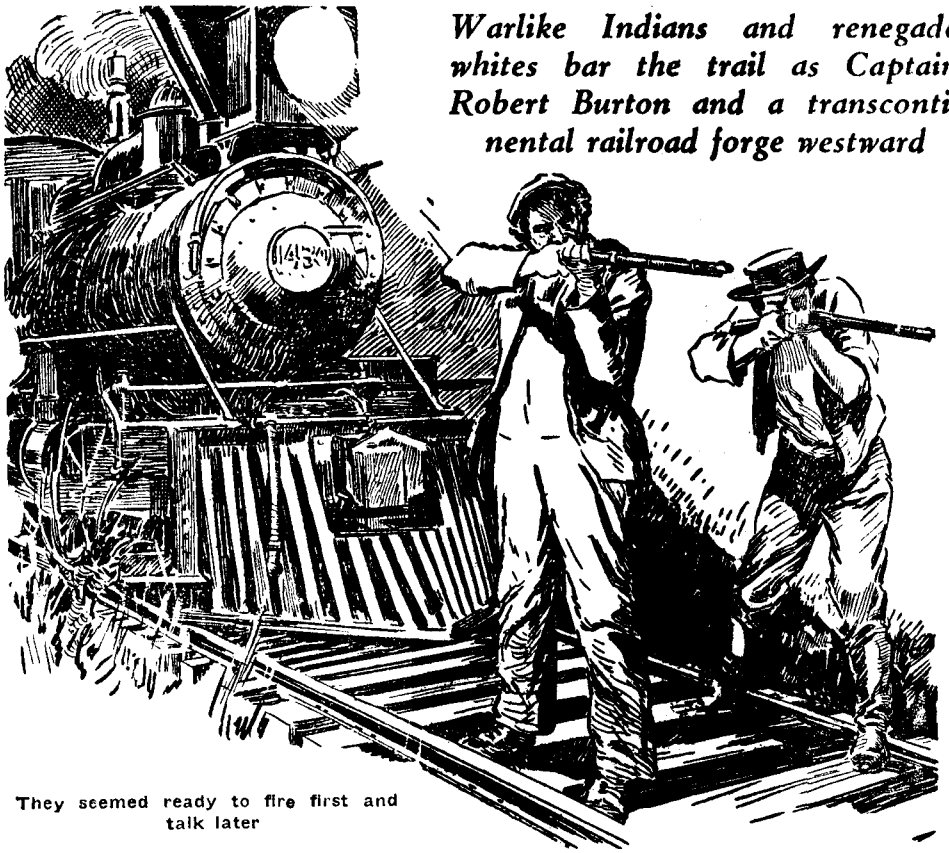
Captain Long Knife

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Redspurs," "Captain Renegade," etc.

Warlike Indians and renegade whites bar the trail as Captain Robert Burton and a transcontinental railroad forge westward



They seemed ready to fire first and talk later

CHAPTER I.

TRAIN WRECK.

UNCERTAINLY revealed by the yellow-white glare of the distant headlight, two figures crouched beside a right-of-way so new that not even weeds had sprouted on its side.

"'Tis a freight," panted the shorter of the two men. "But will yon train stop?"

"Hope so, Mac. Those Cheyenne Dogs can't be so far behind now—and it'll be 'taps' *pronto* if the train runs by."

While his companion in a grimy checkered shirt crossed to the bank above the single line of tracks and, gripping a long barreled revolver, peered into the blue-black darkness of the Nebraska night, the speaker bent, hastily struck a match and held it to a wrinkled shred of paper. A tongue of flame flared into existence just long enough to reveal a rugged, perspiring face so gaunt that at first glance one might have taken it for an Indian's. Had an observant man been looking on he would have further glimpsed a fringed buckskin hunting shirt, a wide Mexican belt which was elaborately mounted with silver, and a sombrero of distinctly Mexican cut.

"If they dinna stop, Bob, what will we do?" The long limbed Scot came scrambling down the bank again, his features taut.

"Fight fo' our lives, Mac, when the

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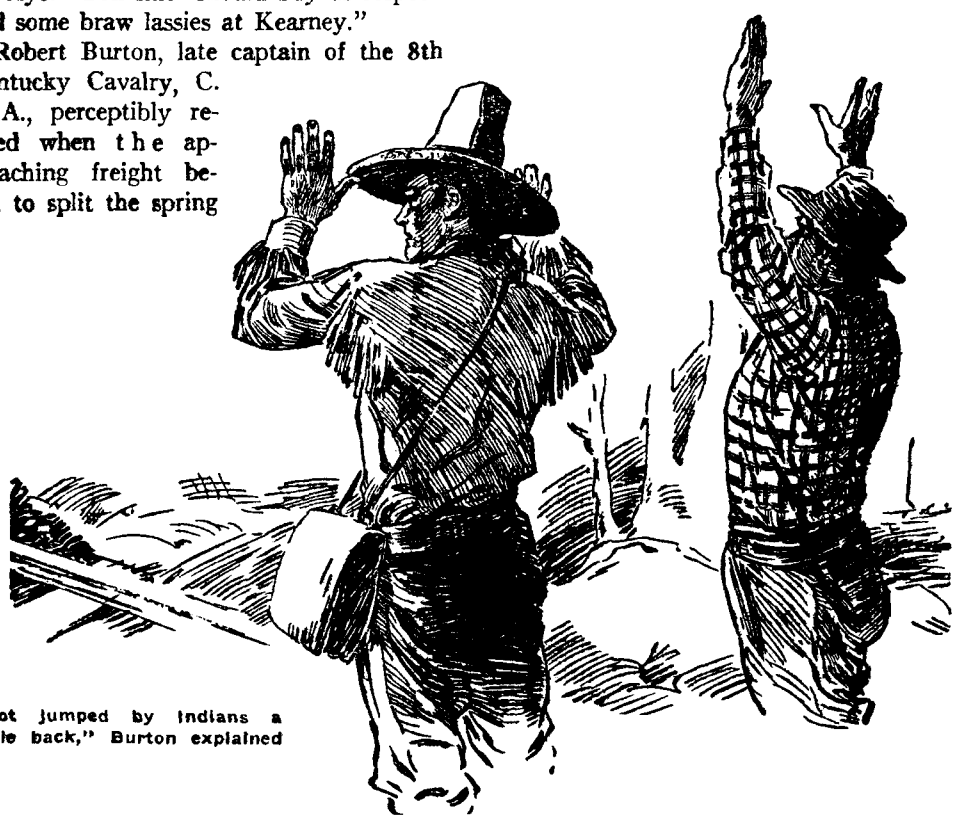
Dogs catch up. Reckon the Cheyennes are mighty mean to prisoners—least they were when I was a kid back in Kansas."

"Domn those red de'ils. They're no sportin' gentry to be shootin' horses. I hated to lose them."

"Better lose them than our scalps," observed the taller man. "Or this." He patted a bulging army haversack which slatted over his left hip and partially obscured a red stripe running down the side of his breeches.

"Aye. Yon siller should buy us respect and some braw lassies at Kearney."

Robert Burton, late captain of the 8th Kentucky Cavalry, C. S. A., perceptibly relaxed when the approaching freight began to split the spring



"Got jumped by Indians a while back," Burton explained

night's stillness with an abrupt whistling for brakes. Clattering, clanking and panting like a winded behemoth, a balloon stacked locomotive ground to a halt with its immensely long cow catcher not sixty yards from the sweat drenched fugitives, and like a single angry eye its coal oil headlight picked out the silver ornaments on Burton's belt.

"Don't shoot!" called the ex-Confederate when a pair of hard featured firemen jumped down, each levelling a carbine and obviously ready to fire first and talk later.

"Keep your dukes up, both of yez. What the hell you want?" growled the foremost, a bearded giant with a greasy cap pushed askew on the back of a mop of yellow hair.

"Got jumped by Indians a while back," the taller figure explained. "Better look sharp—"

"Aw, they's always hostiles 'round here," grunted the second fireman. "Lousy Cheyennes—you ain't scared of 'em, are ye?"

"Domned right," snapped Colin MacKaye. "Ye'd better be, too; the country's full o' the bloody de'ils."

"Injuns?" From the cab's window protruded a grimy, partially bald head. "Them critters scarin' tenderfeet agin? Haw! Haw!"

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In the darkness Captain Burton's lean face flushed as he hurried towards the steam oozing monster. "We've been puttin' up a fight all afternoon."

The bearded fireman peered through the gloom. "One of 'em winged you, 'pears like. Arrow or shot?"

"Arrow," Burton replied briefly. "Just a graze."

"'At's good—arrer wounds ain't no joke — damned Comanche plugged me in the leg this spring."

"Shake a leg, you hombres," the engineer called down. "We gotta get rollin' if we're to put ol' 15 in Willer Crick on time."

Robert Burton paused. "You got any soldiers aboard? These hills are crawlin' with Cheyennes and a sprinklin' o' Brule Sioux."

The engineer spat contemptuously into the darkness. "Nary a trooper aboard, but to hell with them red cusses." He sent a rush of steam roaring up to make the low bare hills resound. "They's a passenger car tacked on the end. Jed'll take yore fare if you got any dinero." So saying, the engineer disappeared into the locomotive's cab and a fireman rapidly fed logs into Number 15's firebox until sparks from its gunnel went whirling madly off to the east.

"Better hurry." The second fireman passed his carbine up to the engineer and swung aboard. "But don't worry, boys, those blasted devils shoot at us sometimes, and once in a while some crazy buck tries to rope the smokestack, but that's all they ever do."

MEANWHILE Burton was, with long quick strides, leading the way towards a dim glow of lights far to the rear, the thrums of his hunting shirt softly tapping on wide, weather beaten shoulders. "Union Pacific R. R." Ghostly white the words glimmered on a long succession of cars.

Ever scanning the velvet blackness beyond the Platte, the fugitives passed a stock car in which horses stamped and squealed, destined for the end-o'-track. Next they hurried past flat cars heaped with precious ties, little dreaming that each one had in his treeless prairie country cost well over three dollars.

A brakeman perched on a box car's roof waved a warning hand as he yelled, "Better shake a leg, boys. Bully Brooks ain't waitin' long in these parts."

"Thanks," said Burton, and over his shoulder glimpsed the glare of flames licking from the smoke stack to tinge the locomotive's smoke a furious scarlet.

Number 15's whistle screeched impatiently, then the trucks of a lone passenger car, coupled on just before the freight's chunky caboose, groaned and the two fugitives swung lightly onto its steps as the freight recommenced its westward journey.

When Captain Robert Burton opened the coach's door he found himself looking on as oddly assorted a company as he had beheld since, as a gangling stripling, he had deserted his father's Kansas farm to join Bedford Forrest's hard riding, ever hungry troopers. Lord! How much water had flowed down the Mississippi since then.

Four smoky lamps were shedding an amber glare on the car's interior and only poorly revealing details. Near the door a couple of sunburned soldiers on furlough lolled on their seat frankly fondling a pair of painted trollops who, in gay, overly frilled garments, promptly fixed eyes at first appraising and then languishing on this tall, not unhandsome figure so effectively framed in the coach doorway.

When MacKaye closed the door behind him a hard faced passenger glanced up from a poker game played on a suitcase and briefly studied the newcomers.

"Heyo," he drawled and shot none too clean cuffs of celluloid. "What comic opera you in? 'Chased by Redskins' or 'The Midnight Escape'?"

Burton grinned at the gambler. "Hope you play the title rôle sometime," he said as he strode by, followed by Colin MacKaye, late of Her Britannic Majesty's Household Cavalry.

By far the greater number of passen-

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gers were men—alike only in alertness of manner and the need of soap and water. Among them the black haired man in the wide sombrero recognized clerks, contractors, soldiers, laborers and surveyors; all evidently headed for the roaring mushroom towns farther west. It was a curiously vigorous crowd, Burton realized, for not a person in the car but was armed one way or another. Several soft spoken, long mustached individuals were veritable walking arsenals with three or four revolvers supplementing knives and daggers at their belts. Hardly a man but had a carbine or a rifle of some sort propped against the seat beside him. Even the handful of painted, shrill-voiced women carried pearl-handled derringers tucked into their handbags, or—as in the case of those Burton had already noticed—brazenly dangled their deadly little pistols at the end of bright ribbons made fast to belts of rattlesnake skin.

THE fugitives made their way towards an unoccupied seat, and Burton in particular was hampered by his heavy haversack in his progress over mounds of baggage stacked in the aisles. All at once the train lurched violently on rounding a curve and one of his elaborate steel and gold spurs caught in a carpet bag, so that he staggered and half fell into the lap of a young woman who, heavily veiled, sat dozing amid a heap of luggage. Burton's hand encountered the sleeper's knee and perforce he clutched its softness to recover himself.

"Oh! You—you—!" Instantly the hand of the girl in the dark blue traveling costume flashed up and dealt him a ringing slap along his lean brown cheekbone. Furiously blood rushed into a long scar which, starting above the new passenger's ear, ran forward along the edge of his blue-black hair.

"Why, why, ma'am—I didn't mean—I—" he fumbled for words, conscious of a pair of very outraged brown eyes.

"It seems," the girl observed in cutting accents that banished his propitiating smile, "that if there are any gentlemen west of Omaha you are not one of them."

"But really, ma'am," Burton struggled erect, the lamp light glinting on the tang of a curious long bladed knife he was wearing on his right hip just back of a holstered revolver, "I meant no offense—I lost my balance."

"Three Western 'gentlemen' have also managed to 'lose their balance,'" the girl snapped, her cheeks suddenly aflame because guffaws and loud laughter arose from all sides.

Despite the jolting of the car, Burton straightened, gray eyes humorously asparkle, and he managed a jerky little bow as he drawled, "In that case, ma'am, you must be plumb magnetic."

"Why—I—I—" Another furious crimson tide surged into the girl's smooth cheeks and her bright lower lip crept vexedly between small and even white teeth. "Of all the impertinent—"

"Leave be, Bob," advised the Scot, who had settled himself on the vacant seat and was enjoying the scene no little. "Ye'd best catch some rest, my lad, or your braw lassie will be thinkin' 'tis a scarecrow come home to roost."

Grinning a little, Emperor Maximilian's late supporter turned toward his companion, the red stripe on his dark blue trousers gleaming briefly.

"Heyo, soldier, settle us a bet," called a gaunt individual in the seat behind MacKaye. "Joe here 'lows by them blue pants that yore a Yank. But I say you talk Secesh."

Burton's teeth flashed in a smile which had smoothed many a rough path for him.

"Collect your bet, stranger. These blue pants were made in Tampico. Durin' the late war I was a Reb."

The thin faced man nodded eagerly. "Shake, mister, so was I. Fought all through in Longstreet's Corps, Army o' No'thern Virginny."

Burton clasped the grimy outstretched hand and noted, as he sank into his seat, that the speaker wore a very threadbare gray blouse on which plain horn buttons

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had replaced golden ones which no doubt had soon disappeared after Appomattox.

"And say, Johnny, I wouldn't sit so nigh the window after we pass Willow Creek," the Virginian advised as he bit off a chew of tobacco from a plug tendered by a buck toothed companion who boasted an enormous pair of ginger colored whiskers.

"Why?"

"Them damned Injuns take a pot shot sometimes; by law of averages even a redskin cain't miss *all* the time."

"Thanks, I'll look out." Once having placed the heavy haversack between his feet, Burton eased the Colt revolver onto his lap, twisted his sheath knife into a comfortable position and, while the Scot relaxed, fell to surveying the other passengers.

MOST of these unshaven, red faced men wore fragments of blue or gray uniforms and had an old soldier look about them. Near at hand sat a grizzled cavalry sergeant engaged in a noisy game of rondo cooloo with a pair of privates and a flashily dressed "drummer." The girl in blue, he noted with inward amusement, still sat rigidly erect with indignation written in every line of her small head and softly rounded shoulders.

Longstreet's veteran observed his interest and raised his voice over the deafening clatter of the car wheels.

"Touchy little Yankee," he grinned. "You sho' caught a mean clip."

"She's right pretty," Burton replied uneasily. "I didn't mean to bother her."

"One of them spoiled high and mighty gals from the East," grunted the ginger whiskered man. "Been ordering everybody 'round here like they was niggers. Wal, she'll learn better—out here everybody's got to do for themselves."

"Who is she?" Burton inquired, then flushed, surprised that he should have found even half a thought for any girl save Enid Culver. How wonderfully patient Enid had been—never doubting, never complaining, always sure that he'd come for her—as he now was coming to claim her.

"She's a Miss Valcour, the conductor told me. 'Lowed her pap's a Senator—one of the railroad backers, most likely."

"Queer he'd let her travel alone—"

"She ain't alone—got a maid with her, but the maid's scared stiff of Injuns and is hidin' out in the baggage compartment. There's a couple more flighty fee-males in there with her. But speakin' o' Injuns, how come you to get that arrer hole in yer sleeve?"

Burton's bronzed features contracted a little. "My pardner and I got chased by a bunch of Cheyennes towards sundown. They killed our horses 'bout a mile from the railroad, but we fought 'em off and got away after dark."

Robert Burton was so entirely casual that Mistress Valcour's small, high held head turned and she shot the long-legged figure a fleeting glance.

"Did you say 'Injuns'?" Three or four passengers turned in their seats.

"Yes. Southern Cheyennes — seemed right mean, too."

"Reckon that'll be Turkey Leg's outfit or my name ain't Phil Crockett—blast their bloody souls! Cavalry from Fort McPherson's been chasing 'em," explained the Virginian. "So I reckon they'll be headed back to the Republican by now."

"Mebbe," grunted the ginger whiskered man, his body swaying to the jolt of the uneven road bed.

"Horse soljers never ketchum Dog Soljer, only North Scout," mumbled a Pawnee Indian who, wrapped in a glaring scarlet blanket, was steadily drinking wh ky from a canteen. "Dog Soljer run too fast."

"Well, what's it to us?" growled one of the gamblers. "Damned redskins ain't never bothered a train yet. Think they're sperrits—I allow."

"Mebbe they ain't wrecked none, but they've sure shot at 'em plenty," volunteered a man in the uniform of an infantry corporal. "Killed five passengers last week alone—"

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"Mebbe the ladies had better go to the baggage car," suggested Crockett, the Virginian. "Pass the word up—gals are a sight too scarce 'round here for us to let the little darlings get hurt by lousy Cheyennes."

Heads were bent forward as the suggestion was relayed forward. Apparently it was well taken, for presently the two Cyprians from the front of the car and a couple of less obvious charmers a few seats ahead of Burton caught up their skirts and, simpering and giggling a good deal, departed.

A few moments later the aristocratic girl in blue was the only woman remaining in the car, the narrow door to the baggage compartment having swallowed up the rest.

The drunken Pawnee commenced to snore, and Burton composed himself to think of Enid—Enid! No longer half a continent, only a hundred miles ahead.

The car wheels had commenced to grind on a curve when all at once the locomotive's whistle screamed, its wail was as terrifying as anything from a human throat. Viciously the train bucked twice ere Burton's brain had registered the sensation, and the passenger car shot sickeningly upwards into space, then it crashed amid a terrific crackle of snapping wood and shattered glass. Loud sounded agonized howls, screams and curses as the caboose toppled into the rear of the car, in a brief instant crushing the baggage compartment to bloody kindling.

The kerosene lamps having gone out, Burton was flung madly through a lightless hell filled with objects that struck him from every angle. Then his head came sharply in contact with something and he saw more lights than he had seen since the siege of Fort Donelson.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGHT BY THE TRAIN.

IT was a scene worthy of the brush of Gustave Doré which gradually materialized before Robert Burton's dazed and swimming eyes. By a queer flickering light he could make out a double row of seats above him; nearer at hand seemingly detached arms, legs and hands wildly or feebly beat the air. Desperately he lashed consciousness back into his benumbed body when a gray, snakelike streamer of acrid wood smoke crawled over his chest and stung his nose. Also spurring the necessity for swift action resounded the outlandish screams of passengers pinned in the wreckage and, worst of all, the hideous "*Ah who-o-o wah!*" war screech of the Southern Cheyennes.

The ex-Confederate found that he was lying under some light débris on the roof of the half demolished coach which, in its death agonies, must have turned completely over. Painfully he pulled free and at the same time tried to orient himself. He soon perceived that the smoke was coming from a blaze at the other end of the car—a car full of squirming, groaning and mangled people; spearlike splinters had wrought ghastly injuries.

"MacKaye!" he called frenziedly. "Colin! Where are you?"

"Aiblins in hell, dinna ken," came a muffled voice, then a groping hand struck Burton's side. "I'm no hurt, are you?"

"No, let's get out." Eyes full of stinging smoke, Burton frantically felt for his guns. One of them had disappeared, but the other was still in its holster.

"This way! Come this way!" yelled a frantic voice. "Hyar's a big hole."

Slowly the two squirmed over mounds of luggage and loose car seats, and more than once Burton's groping hands encountered warm and impassive flesh. The light of flames ever mounting outside the coach now began beating in through the shattered windows to reveal such horrors as the soldier of fortune had not seen since the dreadful massacres after the intaking of Queretaro.

"Keep your head," Burton fought down a panic-stricken impulse when a puff of hot smoke beat in his face and filled his eyes with scalding tears. "Enid Culver—you've got to get out—Enid! Enid!"

Purer air presently told him he must be

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nearing a hole in the side of the shattered passenger coach, but he paused when his fingers encountered something smoothly soft amid the bits of shattered glass and jagged splinters. Just then the fire flared and he found himself with his fingers grasping the skirt of the Valcour girl. Whether Senator Valcour's daughter was dead or not, he could not tell, but she was quite limp, and there was a dark trickle creeping from the corner of her mouth which was gruesomely marring the pallor of her chin.

Other survivors, seen like grotesque hobgoblins amid the ruddy tinted smoke, were crawling by him, bumping and floundering into him, whimpering and making little animal noises of fear. Hotter grew the bitter smoke, for the flames were spreading with appalling rapidity to inject a new note of horror.

SOMEHOW Captain Robert Burton staggered onto his feet after gathering the girl's slight body in his arms, to follow Colin MacKaye's big figure out through a hole where splinters seemed like gigantic teeth. Hot tears streaming down his cheeks, coughing, staggering and grinding broken glass under foot, the ex-captain suddenly emerged into blessed fresh air. His ears filled with a dreadful clamor, he instinctively eased his burden to earth and sank flat—must see what was going on—now he was nearly blind. Presently his eyes cleared to behold a sight which brought home the desperation of his position.

Blazing coals from the locomotive's firebox had set fire to the foremost freight cars and so furnished light for a horde of half naked, hideously daubed Cheyennes to swarm like ants over the rest of the wrecked train. Nearer at hand five or six passengers were crouched half dazed on the raw earth of the embankment, rubbing their eyes and coughing; and two more, bleeding from ugly splinter wounds, lay watching the fire-lit saturnalia, all the while panting like hurt animals.

Characteristically, Burton was the first to recover, to perceive the extreme peril of the wreck's survivors. At any minute the Cheyennes would be turning to other and grimmer amusements. Though more passengers came crawling and squirming out of the wreck, a swift glance at the survivors told Burton that their chances were slim indeed. So few of them had weapons of any kind.

"How many rifles we got?" he called to the men nearest him.

ROBERT BURTON

"I got one. I got a Wesson—"

"That all? Then some of us must get back into the car—get guns. Any guns we can find. MacKaye!"

"Aye, Rob?" The gaunt Scot crawled over a burst portmanteau and made a wild figure when crackling flames revealed a long scratch across his chin.

Anxiously Burton studied the surrounding terrain—noted a low hillock some sixty yards to the right.

"Colin," he called over the roar of the flames and the insane screeching of the Cheyennes, "take—men up to—knoll. This girl, too. Might make a stand there."

"Aye," the Scot nodded, and turned quickly to the breathless survivors. "Any of ye ken how to fight a skirmish?"

"Reckon so—had four year o' practice," panted a surveyor in the remains of a gray uniform. "Where you-all goin'?"

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"After guns—" Burton called back as two more coughing men, their clothing a-smolder, came staggering out of the inferno. Shouldering these aside, Burton and the grizzled cavalry sergeant he had previously spoken to shielded their faces from the heat and re-entered the shambles. He began to feel about in the tumbled débris for anything resembling a firearm.

Then, for the first time since the coach had taken its mad plunge to destruction, Burton recalled his heavy haversack. An icy pang shot through him. Good God, the fruits of two years of desperate fighting down in Mexico was about to vanish in flame and smoke! Where was that bag which meant so much to the future of Enid Culver?

It was characteristic, however, that instead of searching for the all-important haversack, he recalled the helpless men without and maintained his quest for firearms.

Four rifles and a pair of revolvers were the sum of Burton's success when the flames drove him towards the hole again. He encountered the cavalry sergeant, singed and blistered, crawling in orange-hued murk.

"I got five carbines and a pin-fire," he yelled. "C'mon, cap'n, we gotta go—Injuns are gettin' hep."

"Get me out! I'm burning! Help! Help! Ah-h God! Kill me—I can't stand it!"

It was heart-rending to turn away with such piteous appeals making the night resound, yet Burton knew he must. Helpless, unarmed men were awaiting his return and, judging by the blood-freezing ululations of the triumphant Cheyennes, the sooner he got to the knoll top the better.

As the ex-Confederate lurched towards the great wound in the coach's side his foot caught in something which would not come loose when he kicked. The flames were licking nearer so he stooped awkwardly because of his armful of firearms and tried to cast off the entanglement. No luck. Damn! His fingers flew along a leather strap, then they tingled when they came in contact with a familiar stamped leather surface. His lost haversack! It was the work of an instant to whip out his long knife and slash through the sling strap which had been imprisoned by a fallen beam. Then, bent under his doubly precious burden, he re-emerged onto the right-of-way.

Swaying like a drunken man, his hunting shirt blackened and smoking in several places, Robert Burton stumbled down into the ditch and through blinding tears made out a trio of passengers limping towards the summit of that little knoll he had indicated. Already from the top of it brief jets of flame were beginning to rake the night in feeble defiance to an increasingly heavy rain of arrows which came whispering through the smoke like soft-voiced messengers of doom.

Higher flared the burning train, lighting the whole Platte valley, until the river's jet waters so violently threw back the crimson glare that it seemed as if a river of blood were flowing towards the distant Missouri. From inside the blazing passenger coach sounded a shot, another shot.

"Poor devils," Burton panted as he labored up the hill. "Reckon I'd do it myself."

"Hurry up!" hoarsely yelled the cavalry sergeant who had got a brief lead while Burton salvaged his haversack.

"They coming?"

"Yes. Shake a leg or the vermin will cut us off."

Only a few yards behind and half screened by smoke had appeared some swift, shadowy figures. The ex-Confederate raced up beside his companion. "We won't make it like this. Grab these rifles—I'll try to stand the brutes off a bit."

"Like hell you will, Johnny Reb—I'm a-stayin', too," the sergeant grimly retorted.

"Damn it! Do as you're told," Burton snarled. "Need those rifles up yonder—Get 'em there! This bag, too!"

And such was Burton's innate gift of authority that the sergeant obediently took

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the haversack and the firearms and went panting up the sandy slope.

Redly outlined by the flaming wreck, the ex-Confederate knelt and swiftly adjusted the sights of a salvaged Spencer carbine. He was as cool, he found, as clear seeing and calculating as he had been in any of those deadly little skirmishes which had flickered up and down the Mississippi valley.

A disorganized line of dismounted Cheyennes broke through a smoke pall hanging over the right-of-way; in their van ran a splendidly built savage who waved the dripping scalp of the gray-haired engineer.

Dropping on one knee, Burton threw his sights on the leader, the Spencer's recoil jarred his shoulder, and the big Cheyenne threw his hands up and, spinning half around, fell heavily.

It was all a question, the soldier of fortune realized, of whether those weapons he had sent to the knoll top would be delivered in time to help him. Jaws tight locked, he next threw his sights on a crude yellow cross drawn across the chest of a sub-chief who wore a wolf mask headdress. His excitement growing, Burton this time felt no recoil, but the Indian crumpled and tripped the braves at his heels. At the same instant Burton sent an empty cartridge case tinkling onto the ground.

Five shots left. Because the attackers were closing in faster now he quickly shifted aim and, with all the skill of an experienced skirmisher, selected the most headlong of the screeching savages.

ANOTHER and still another shot he sped, but nevertheless the Cheyennes swept on, their sweaty, semi-naked bodies a-gleam in the firelight. An arrow sighed by scant inches overhead, then another plunged itself up to the feathers in the earth before Burton's spurred black boots.

Only ten yards away were the foremost of the fantastically painted savages when with his fourth shot he dropped a hulking savage who had entwined half a bolt of blue silk about him.

Damn! Had an arrow struck down the cavalry sergeant? Why didn't those men up yonder open fire? A few seconds more and it would be too late. A chill sweat suddenly sprang out on his brow.

"Fire, you fools!" he shouted over his shoulder. "I can't keep this up. Fire! For God's sake! Fire!"

A confused clamor came to his ears and only a scattering of shots answered his appeal. Too bad, no Enid now. Well, he'd shoot to the last minute, then break for the knoll top. Not that he'd ever get there—

His sixth shot he barely got off at point blank range, then the Cheyennes were leaping all about him. Clutching hands were outstretched and screeching cries that made the howls of hungry wolves seem like lullabies rang in his ears when, with his last cartridge, he singed the face of a towing chief who wore four tall *coup* feathers twisted into his braided scalp lock.

Burton gave ground in order to club the heavy carbine and glared about for an opening, but it seemed that hell had disgorged its choicest fiends. The throbbing red glare only revealed a thronging pattern of faces hideous beyond imagination. Snarling like wolves, and thrusting with feather and scalp decorated lances, a band of Dog Soldiers closed in, though Burton used his carbine like a flail and crushed the skull of the foremost. He dodged a viciously swung war ax, wheeled and with his heavy boot delivered a shattering kick to the stomach of a second assailant. Thus he gained time to swing the carbine again, but he was only postponing the inevitable. Subconsciously, he was well aware of it—the Cheyennes were too many.

Frantically now, the soldier of fortune swung his carbine, felt it thud against firmly yielding bodies. Hands clawed at him from the night, seized him, jerked him sidewise—backwards. Out of the chaos knives glittered evilly before his staring eyes. It was the end; he braced himself for the sting of steel, but from the hilltop there now rolled out a steady volley such as only veteran soldiers can deliver. The eddy of

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Indians about Burton thinned miraculously and only a quartet of braves remained to thrust and hack at him. Another volley crashed out and more writhing shapes dotted the slope of the knoll; some fell screaming, some without a sound. Two of the ex-Confederate's immediate assailants seemed to have been swallowed up by the night.

Still furiously attacked, he retreated a few steps and, though the muscles of his arms felt like red-hot wires, he whirled the ruined carbine above his head and beat down the guard of a stalwart brave who wore a coyote headdress. Howling, the Cheyenne sprang back, his shattered left arm limply a-dangle and ran off down the hill, but the remaining warrior refused to be daunted and, raising a war knife, he leaped in upon the breathless and sweat blinded white man.

BURTON gave ground when he found that the carbine's stock was gone and so shortened as to be nearly useless—but another volley from the knoll top sent the returning raiders springing back to the shelter of the right-of-way. Thus Burton's struggle with the Dog Soldier became a duel pure and simple. No vainglorious fool, Burton tried to expose his enemy to the fire from above, but the wily Cheyenne always kept him for a shield until, redly outlined by the fire, he raised his glittering knife and sprang. Burton slipped and went down, but he braced himself and, following the code of the frontier which permits no niceties in combat, kicked upward with all his failing strength. His heart seemed to be pierced by an icy arrow when the Indian twisted in mid-air and so caught the kick on his thigh.

"Ugh-h!" The savage's grunt of pain hinted at what might have happened had the kick gone to its mark—the stomach.

Howling with pain and fury, the Indian swung and the deadly blade hissed by Burton's ear. The latter ducked and at the same time grabbed at his holster, but to his utter dismay the revolver was empty. Damn! Then he was on his feet again.

Dimly conscious of shouts from the knoll top and a gale of fearful yells from below, the adventurer's hand flashed to the back of his silver mounted belt and closed on the rawhide rattan handle of his bowie knife which boasted ten inches of razor sharp steel. Barely he got it free; the war knife was hovering over his head again.

Anticipating a further retreat, the Indian leaped forward as he struck and so slashed at empty air when Burton, instead of retreating, surged forward, his body bunched behind his knife hand. There followed a thudding impact that jarred the white man's whole body as his nostrils became filled with rancid body odors of the Cheyenne; the knife met an obstacle which held a split second, only to yield, and then the ten-inch blade slid home and Burton's knife hand was drenched by a warm flood. Expertly he pressed down on the handle before jerking out the long knife. The savage squalled once like a trapped cougar, then, as Burton spun away, collapsed on his face.

At the outcome of the duel a shout went up from the knoll top where knelt the handful of survivors. Fourteen in all they proved to number, with scant ammunition and even scanter hope, for, just as Burton, gasping and all but spent, stumbled into a hollow atop the knoll, a fresh swarm of mounted Indians came furiously galloping around the end of the burning train. Setting up a blood freezing clamor, the dismounted Cheyennes who had previously attacked sprang up from the ditch and joined their fellows in a furious assault upon the knoll.

CHAPTER III.

"SURRENDER OR DIE!"

"AMMUNITION'S verra near oot." Hardly had Burton flung himself down when Colin MacKaye called this cheering bit of news.

"Save it, then! Stop this fool snipin'!" Thin face gaunter than ever, Burton caught up a rifle and adjusted its sights with

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trembling, blood slippery fingers. That two of the passengers had already fallen under the hail of arrows he saw at a glance, and beyond them the girl lay motionless, a long length of blue gartered leg protruding lax from beneath voluminous but disarranged skirts.

"Circle's too big," Burton snapped in summing up the situation. "Everybody fall back five yards. Quick! None to fire till I say so—"

"Yeah — let the bloody devils ride closer," yelled a cowboy when the mounted Cheyennes commenced their inevitable tactics of riding about the hillock in a slowly tightening circle. Waiting like wolves eager to tear their prey, the swarm of dismounted savages gathered, waiting—waiting.

"Ain't got but ten shots," grimly related the train's red-bearded conductor. "How many you got, sergeant?"

"'Bout fifteen," snapped the cavalryman, his broad yellow chevrons turned to orange by the roaring conflagration. "Savin' the last one for myself if them Cheyennes bust our ring."

"Everyone aim low — we're shootin' down hill, don't forget." Burton's voice rang above the turmoil like the blast of a brazen trumpet. "Count three between volleys. Seems like our only chance is to punish 'em so bad they'll haul off—"

The group of embattled passengers made an unforgettable group as they heard the sands of their lives running low. No two men were garbed alike; some were well dressed, others in the roughest of section hand clothes. Cowboys, soldiers, gamblers, trainmen and merchants, they waited for the word of this gaunt young man with the quick gray eyes.

Nor were the weapons of the doomed handful any less varied. Perhaps nine of them were fortunate enough to be armed with Spencer repeating carbines such as Burton had used during his personal battle to cover the cavalry sergeant's retreat. In addition there was a sprinkling of obsolete Sharp's carbines, clumsy single shot affairs just a shade better than old time muzzle loaders. A brakeman with the broken shaft of an arrow sprouting oddly from the left shoulder of a grimy undershirt was clutching a long barreled pin-fire such as were furnished to U. P. train crews. Those who had revolvers laid them ready to hand.

"Cain't never stand them off," sobbed a wild-eyed youngster. "Oh, God! they must be a thousand o' them red butchers."

"Not over a couple of hundred," lied Burton. "We can drive 'em off easy—it's often been done by less men than us."

But his confidence failed him when he reflected on the appalling shortage of ammunition—no amount of nerve could make up for powder and lead. He stifled a bitter groan.

A resounding united screech made the fire-reddened heavens quiver and Burton promptly shot a quick glance to the left and right.

"Steady, boys! Here they come!" How tensed were the unshaven, red-brown faces of his companions. The battle light was gleaming in MacKaye's eyes as he cuddled a Spencer stock to his cheek; the cavalry sergeant with one of his enormous black walrus mustaches drooping over the lock of his carbine was singing a ribald song. Yonder crouched the wounded brakeman, cursing steadily save when he paused to spit blood. And just behind him lay Mistress Valcour, her lovely face incongruously placid.

A SWELLING thunder of hoofs told him the mounted Indians were at last preparing to ride in, converge and overwhelm the survivors. Being to the left of the burning train, the mounted attackers were very plainly to be seen and offered tempting targets, but such was the power of Burton's personality that not a shot was fired even when the ground commenced to tremble under the impact of six hundred odd hoofs.

"Wah-wah! Wah!" A splendidly proportioned and nearly naked savage on a white pony suddenly rode out ahead, brandished overhead a heavy carbine as if it had been a stick and began motioning to the right and left.

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Though Death had been Captain Robert Burton's shadow very many times during the past six years, there was something awesome, something unnerving about this vista of painted riders, countless swaying lances, guns and war bonnets.

In spite of himself, Burton's forefinger quivered when it crept through his Spencer's trigger guard. He'd wait until the foremost horseman passed that Indian he had slain with his knife and then—

A lifetime dragged by, louder swelled the infernal clamor—closer.

"Now!" And in company with fourteen others he pressed his trigger.

Instantly a ring of smoke smothered the knoll top and the bitter reek of burnt powder stung Burton's nose.

"One!" While peering through the smoke he began to count and snapped forward the ejector lever. "Two!" He sent the empty cartridge case spinning onto the parched soil. "Three!" Through a gap in the rose-hued powder smoke he glimpsed, and aimed at, a fantastically daubed chief who held aloft a lance garnished with scalps and *coup* feathers. But an over-eager young warrior rode in between at the last minute and for his pains was knocked off his pony.

When the echoes of the second volley, diminished by the two single-shot carbines, had rumbled back among the barren hills across the Platte, many things were happening out in front. Confusedly, the ex-Confederate could distinguish the ear piercing shrieks of wounded horses, the thud of bodies falling heavily to earth, but still the Cheyenne attack was pressed with unaccustomed vigor.

A third volley—become ragged because of the difference in the various defenders' speed of fire—was fired into howling faces not fifty feet away. The ground beneath Burton's carbine barrel cast back the brief glow of the discharge and his ears buzzed from the concussion of the reports all about. Would they still press on? He feared so. The whole world seemed filled with swaying feathers, spurts of fire, rearing horses and nightmarish painted faces.

Rising on one knee, Burton, the cavalry sergeant and MacKaye formed a steady nucleus about which the others formed, but the timorous youth uttered a queer bleating sound and ran away in a suicidal attempt at flight.

The fourth volley delivered at point blank range and lighting up the hostile array wrought fearful execution. To Burton's amazement an incredible number of Indians seemed to go down; for the moment it did not occur to him that one carbine bullet was killing as many as three men.

COLIN MacKAYE

Up, relentlessly up, surged the tide of attackers, and Burton's thoughts became disjointed— Could he reload? Were the Cheyennes breaking through? He blinked and coughed, for the air was full of noise and his nostrils were stung by acrid burnt powder smoke. His heart stopped! God help those taken alive. Yes, the Cheyennes were actually about to ride over the hilltop. No time now for volley firing. Burton fired his fifth shot point blank into the ochre and red daubed chest of a brave at whose saddle bow a brace of fresh scalps were shedding gruesome red drops onto the pony's brown and white forelegs.

Up, up, seeming grotesquely tall, the Indian towered above him when the pony reared. But the beast must have gone over backwards for there was only a gap before him when Burton arose from catching up a

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revolver he had previously appropriated from a fallen man. Even while he cocked it, a shot banged in his face and singed away one of his eyebrows. Half dazed, he extended the Colt at full length and fired into an outlandish face, then got to his feet in search of a fresh adversary. But to his amazement there was no one nearer at hand than MacKaye and the bareheaded, wildly cursing cavalry sergeant. Streaked with powder, they were frantically searching their pockets for ammunition.

CHARACTERISTICALLY, the Cheyennes had veered off in the very moment of victory—a weakness which had, and would go, to save the lives of those who toiled to span the vast "American Desert."

"Beat 'em off, by Gawd!" roared a black bearded trapper suddenly drunk with triumph. "Blew the bloody devils off'n the hill."

"Your napper's all right this time," called the wounded brakeman. "They won't be coming back."

"The hell they won't!" panted the cavalry sergeant, looking up from the bandage he was clumsily adjusting about his right forearm. "Ain't but eight of us left now."

"I tell you, they *ain't* coming back!" the brakeman insisted as if he dared not, would not, face the possibility of being mistaken. "They won't! They won't!"

The slopes of the knoll, Burton saw, presented a scene of carnage calculated to give pause to even such ferocious warriors as the Red Shields, Elk Horn Scrapers and Dog Soldiers below. In fact the gentle grade on the track side of the hillock had, in those three frenzied minutes of battle, become a hideous shambles, carpeted with the grotesque forms of dead and wounded horses, and the still or silently writhing forms of the Cheyennes. Warriors on foot had already begun—as was their invariable custom—to drag away the less exposed dead and wounded. They offered tempting targets, but the wild eyed whites made no effort to shoot at them.

They had good reason, for six of the fifteen men who had commenced the engagement now lay sprawled in curious and tragic positions. Across the diminished circle a gambler, his gay red silk waistcoat dyed a deeper red, lay doubled up with a Kit Fox arrow plunged up to its feathers in his throat.

"How many cartridges—got left?" Burton panted while directing a further constriction of the already shrunken line of defenders.

"Two." "Ain't got none." "Two." "Ain't got none." "Anybody got some .38s?" "Yeh, four. Ye can have two."

Even Captain Robert Burton's cold courage was shaken. An average of three shots apiece was left and the foot of the hill was still swarming with Cheyennes growing furious as they counted their losses. Surely, with the next attack, Dog Soldier scalping knives must run very red. A glance at the rigid, sweaty faces showed that not one of the eight but heard the Dark Angel's wings whistling over this bare, corpse littered hillock.

"Mebbe we could git some ca'tridges off'n the dead Injuns," suggested the wounded brakeman.

"Shucks! What's the use o' pretendin'?" drawled the black bearded trapper. "We ain't going to last longer'n a snowbird in hell. Lucky I had my fun in Julesburg last week. I allow Kansas Kate c'n hunt her up a new sweetie to-morrey."

But revolt surged in Burton's being. How ironic to have survived the great battles of the Civil War; to have come unscathed through a dozen murderous clashes between Emperor Maximilian's mercenaries and the fiendishly cruel Indians of Juarez and Diaz, only to perish thus in an insignificant skirmish beside a wrecked train.

"*Think!* You must *think!*" clamored inward voices. "Maybe there's a way out of this somehow."

HIS furious search for an idea was interrupted by a voice hailing from the foot of the hill, and speaking guttural English!

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"Hey you up thar—ef you surrender peaceable, ol' Turkey Leg sw'ars to let yer keep yer hair—"

"Who's that?" Burton demanded of the sergeant in a quick undertone.

"Must be one o' the Bent brothers," growled the cavalryman as he bit off a chew of tobacco. "May God blacken their blasted faces! They're a pair o' renegades livin' with the Cheyennes."

"Shall we believe yon clapperclaw?" MacKaye's voice sounded quite level.

"Hell no!" The trapper cut in. "George Bent'd be one o' the first to spill your guts onto yer feet."

"No!" the brakeman cried, his lips trembling. "Let's bargain! We're done, anyhow, and they'll sure kill us if we fight."

"It's better to kill ourselves than let the squaws do it," a lanky cattleman pointed out. "I ain't trustin' no Injun!"

"Me either—"

Burton cupped hands and called down the hill. "Tell Turkey Leg we'll fight it out. There's twenty-five of us with plenty o' ammunition. Come on, and we'll give you another dose like that first one!"

"Twenty-five, hell!" Charged with contempt came the gruff reply from below. "We know they ain't more than half a dozen of ye left and yer out o' ammynition."

And therein lay the crux of the situation, but to Burton came that idea which had been eluding him. Lowering his voice he called to his companions, "Listen, it may cost our necks, but we've got to try a bluff. Are you game?"

"Aye," promptly agreed the Scot. "I've never yet gone aglae on Rob Burton's say so."

"What's yer idear?" the trapper wanted to know without turning his head.

"We'll fire some shots in the air. That'll convince them."

"For God's sake, no!" quavered the brakeman, making desperate, pleading little gestures. "They know the truth and we'd be helpless then."

"No!" "No!" Two others joined in vigorous objection.

"Don't be damned fools! This is our only chance, otherwise we're doomed." Burton's voice rang in a fierce undertone. "Do as I tell you!" He raised his voice. "Go to hell, you lousy renegade—we've got ammunition to burn. Listen to this!" Then, in a breathless stage whisper, "Everybody fire!"

Though each man knew that by that shot he came nearer to an end dreadful past imagining, all save the brakeman and one other pointed their weapons at the sky and sent a salvo hissing towards those cool and incredibly peaceful stars.

"Another!"

Grim jawed, Burton slewed and levelled his Colt full at the brakeman's twitching face, "You, too, damn you!"

Though cursing impotently, the train man obeyed and, even as the amazed yells of the savages echoed the first volley, a second roared out.

"How's that?" Burton sprang up, quite unconscious of the wild figure he made thus redly outlined by the fire below. Hatless, with fringed shirt and red striped trousers fouled and bloody, he stood against the purple-black background of the sky and waved a defiance with his now quite useless Spencer. "Maybe you'll believe us now?"

"Like hell!" came back that taunting voice. "We're a-comin' for yer in a minute and then ye'll wish to Gawd ye'd listened to me!"

"Now, you damn' fool," snarled the wounded brakeman. "I hope you're satisfied."

"'Twas a braw try, Rob, but it looks like we're lost," remarked MacKaye and, pulling out an envelope, he commenced to write rapidly something on its back.

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT.

ENDLESS minutes dragged by, keying overwrought nerves tight as piano strings while by the throbbing glare of the burning train a swarm of garishly caparisoned looters milled over the plunder.

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Twice groups of horsemen collected, and Burton felt an icy fist squeeze his heart, but each time the counter attraction of a fresh car being broken into postponed the end.

Burton saw a hulking, half drunken Dog Soldier leap off his war pony, knot one end of a bolt of blue silk to the tail of his sturdy little beast and then, leaping astride again, go careening off over the prairie with yards and yards of the precious stuff rolling behind him. Delighted howls greeted the idea and others copied the scheme, until very shortly the whole flame-tinted plain was alive with screeching, madly galloping warriors weaving a fantastic pattern. Others wantonly smashed cases of lamp chimneys, hacked through stores of harness and dressed themselves in queer bits of feminine attire.

"When's the next freight due?" Burton turned to the brakeman from whose back the trapper was, with rough skill, extracting the broken arrow.

"Number 3's due along in an hour," came his surly response. "But the glare's sure to scare them off."

"Would there likely be any soldiers on it?"

"Dunno," the speaker choked off a groan. "At Kearney they said there are some replacements due for the Second Cavalry, and they'll soon be going up to Fort Sedgewick." The fellow uttered another whistling gasp of pain.

"Why not clear out of here and try to meet Number 3 on the other side of the curve?" someone suggested. "They ought to be warned—might think it was only a common wreck and speed up—"

"Can't do that," the cavalry sergeant objected promptly. "They'd be on us in a minute."

"I'll go," suddenly stated the trapper. "One of us ain't likely to be seen. Maybe I can find a way—I know this prairie same's the butt o' my six-gun."

"If he can find a route we can quit the hill one at a time," Burton suggested. "Here—maybe we can fool 'em."

When the trapper had cautiously backed out of the shallow pit he had scooped from the surface of the hill, Burton entered it and arranged one of the useless rifles so that its barrel tilted over the edge. Next, he placed across its breach an abandoned hat and so created a dummy which might be convincing in this uncertain light.

Breathless, well aware that discovery meant instant death, the defenders of the knoll top one by one crawled off into the darkness and, like so many shadowy baboons, followed a trail indicated by the trapper. At the end of five minutes only the stiffening dead, Colin MacKaye, Burton and the unconscious girl remained.

"All right, out with you, Mac—"

"No. I'll not leave ye." The Scot's ruddy features contracted stubbornly. "Ye'll be needing help wi' the lass."

"Please go," the ex-Confederate pleaded earnestly. "If I don't get away I want you to tell Enid that I—" he unconsciously adopted a phrase learned from his courtly Virginian mother, "that I was ever her unworthy but devoted servant, and that I was honored to have ever had her love. Also say that she can do no better than to trust you, my friend."

The Scottish adventurer's angular jaw tightened amid the shadows and he nodded. "As ye wish. But yer an unco' fine mon, Robbie—I'll never meet a finer. Good luck to ye."

IN an instant his grimy, checkered shirt had vanished behind the clump of sagebrush, leaving Burton and the motionless girl alone on the knoll top and listening to noisy quarrels of savages who were now engaged in drunken combat with each other.

When he bent over the Valcour girl his hopes of saving her ebbed sharply. Had she suffered a fatal concussion or internal injuries in that infernal shaking up?

"Miss Valcour, can you hear me?" he muttered, his lips close to her small ear. "Rouse yourself! For God's sake!" But there came no motion to those extraordinarily long eyelashes resting on the pallor of her cheek like tiny black feather fans fallen on a white silk cushion.

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Perhaps she was dead. He bent, placed his ear to her chest, but the thickness of her garments and the clamor of the marauders made it impossible for him to hear anything. That each passing instant brought more imminent a return of the Cheyennes he was well aware, so he tested her pulse, but could find no stir.

"No use gettin' killed for a corpse—even a pretty one," he reflected and on seeing the neck of a pint bottle protruding from the gambler's coat pocket he snatched it out. Next he slid from its sheath his long, dreadfully dimmed knife and deliberately severed the heavy silk about her throat. He then quickly bared the tender contours below and, bending low, pressed his ear to the smooth, warm flesh. He was encouraged to detect a faint heart-beat, so he promptly uncorked the whisky bottle with his teeth, raised the unconscious girl to his knee and tilted some of the powerful Bourbon between teeth that were white and regular as moonstones on a necklace.

Almost at once the beat of the heart beneath Burton's fingers grew stronger; so in order to ease her compressed diaphragm he laid her flat again and still further mutilated the dark blue dress before cutting a row of corset strings, which operation allowed her chest to fill deeply.

"Funny critters, women," he reflected. "It's a wonder they can breathe—all laced in like this."

Since the Cheyennes were beginning to gallop madly in all directions, it behooved him to work fast, and he fed her more whisky. There was a premonitory flutter then Mistress Valcour's eyes slid open.

"—I what—? Oh, get away! Go away!"

Angrily, Burton pressed a hand over her mouth, quite forgetting that in this red half light his fringed shirt, long jet hair and deeply bronzed features must have looked shockingly Indian-like.

"Quiet," he breathed, "Cheyennes—all 'round us."

As he spoke her eyes probed his with a frightened glare he could not analyze. Probably she had suffered a concussion and was still dazed.

"Swallow this," he directed curtly, "and for your life keep still!" He raised the whisky to her lips and fed her the fiery fluid until she coughed, then, raising the bottle himself, took a long pull; there was plenty of grim work still ahead.

Critically he viewed her voluminous skirts and then he shook his head. "You couldn't run in a Sibley tent like that. Take it off."

"Why—what— Oh!" Mistress Valcour had for the first time discovered the fact of her exposure and she sat up, feebly clutching together the slashed material.

"Did you do this?"

"Yes. Had to." Burton saw nothing of the look she cast him, for he was already crawling over to the smallest of the slain men. "Get rid of those skirts," he directed over his shoulders, "and I'll throw these pants over. Hurry up."

JESSICA VALCOUR started to protest, but the ex-Confederate cast her a look so savage that she shivered and obediently began to fumble with divers hooks and buttons.

Burton found it far from easy to drag off a slain teamster's buckskin breeches; first, because they were comparatively new, and second, because he dared not show his head above the clump of sage.

As he worked he heard the swish and swirl of silk; then, quite oblivious of her déshabille, he turned and flung the garment over to his companion. Sobbing a little, she awkwardly began to pull on the breeches, giving Burton time to inspect his pistol and to rig a new loop for his precious haversack.

His preparations for flight completed, he turned and, to his horror, saw the Valcour girl sitting bolt upright. She made an unforgettable picture with her pallid features gilded by the flames and her coppery hair glowing as if the flames were among her curls instead of two hundred yards distant.

"Get down, you fool!" he snapped and jerked her flat. "You'll give us away! Now follow me. Quick!" So saying, he squirmed off down that same gully which

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the other fugitives had followed. But evidently the girl had been seen for a sudden screeching rent the firelit heavens and there followed an ominous clatter of hoofs. Rigid, the ex-Confederate paused listening—eyes wide and every sense alert— Were the Cheyennes coming this way? No, they were riding around the bend in the track, which argued that it was another of the fugitives who had been seen.

" Come on," he urged when they reached the lee of the knoll. " Reckon it's now or never—stay by me and run till you drop."

He caught her hand, held it tightly, then, slipping and stumbling, the strangely assorted couple raced down the knoll past the tumbled corpses of many men and horses. Instinct, and the wisdom of a veteran soldier, warned him it was safer to veer away from the line of retreat used by the other fugitives. He was encouraged to see the girl could run, and apparently was regaining strength with each passing instant.

When the yells of roving savages swelled louder, Burton pulled the girl into the momentary protection afforded by a thick clump of willows bordering a dry gully. Panting, his perceptions dulled by unbroken nerve strain, Burton nevertheless froze to a sudden immobility and listened. From up the gully had sounded a subtle noise.

" Stay here," he instructed the breathless girl and, drawing that curious knife of his, the ex-Confederate commenced to creep forward through the underbrush. All at once he detected an ominous outline—squirmed forward a few more yards and was puzzled to distinguish a pair of ponies standing quite still. On one of them sat an Indian who was leaning forward and mumbling incoherently to himself.

" A wounded Cheyenne, by God!"

Clenching the long knife between his teeth, Robert Burton crept on with the sinuous silence of a rattler until he perceived his error. The brave though still astride his travel pony, had tilted back his narrow head and was noisily drinking from a champagne bottle.

Though the travel pony shied, Burton's spring was accurate and he dragged the besotted Red Shield back from his saddle to the earth. Promptly the long knife's razor sharp blade slid into that hollow which lies between the shoulder joint and collar bone.

Frantic with fear, the Cheyenne's beast would have lunged away and been lost but, thanks to a Cheyenne custom, the loose end of the pony's hackamore was secured to the belt of the malodorous Red

ENID CULVER

Shield who was still feebly struggling in Robert Burton's clutch. At last the warrior relaxed on the cool sandy earth.

AFTER soothing the frightened pony, Burton next darted across the sand of the creek bed to secure the battle pony which was still contentedly cropping willow leaves. Hurried by strident screeches from the darkness, it took the ex-Confederate but an instant to convert the pony's hackamore into a rude bridle, for even if the Valcour girl could ride, she would never be able to manage this half trained beast with a single rawhide rein.

" Can you ride?" he demanded once he had rejoined the dazed daughter of Senator Valcour. " If you can't, reckon I'd better lash your ankles under this cayuse's belly."

" I—I can ride."

" Mount up, then!"

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With a single powerful sweep, Burton lifted the Valcour girl onto the black and white travel pony and then, with accustomed ease, he vaulted onto the second animal.

It was, he was pleased to discover, a powerful beast, but reasonably tractable to pressure on its feather decorated hackamore.

Drunken howls from the knoll top told him that there would be no time for planning—they must cling to the shelter of this dried creek bed as long as possible and then trust to speed. Already the searchers on the hilltop were scattering in pursuit of the survivors who, temporarily at least, had escaped them.

Willow twigs cruelly whipped the adventurer's face once he kicked the battle pony to a gallop. Before he realized it the sheltering gulley came to an end and the open country loomed just ahead. Throwing an anxious glance over his shoulder he beheld the Valcour girl riding after him, body bent low on her mount's neck and with one hand buried in the mane while the other desperately clutched the rude bridle.

"You're doin' fine," he encouraged. "Now pull yourself together, 'cause we've got to ride mighty hard from now on to save our hair."

The two burst from the protecting shrubbery with all the suddenness of deer roused from their retreat by ranging hounds.

Fervently Burton hoped they might dash across the skyline and, unseen, cross a ridge which would hide them from further observation. His prayer apparently was answered when the scream of a distant locomotive whistle warned of the approach of Number 3.

Even while the wind whistled about his long black hair, and the precious haversack thumped and thudded against the small of his back, Bedford Forrest's ex-captain prayed that those men who had so valiantly fought on the knoll top would reach the protection of the freight—most especially Lieutenant Colin MacKaye, Laird, Soldier of Fortune and trustworthy friend.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

WHETHER their escape was due to the lure of liquor and other appealing loot behind, or due to the skill with which Robert Burton doubled and looped back on their trail before riding over a hard pan of earth, neither Jessica Valcour nor her thin featured guide ever knew. Before long, however, they were galloping steadily on through a vast stillness.

"Oh-h, please stop!" faintly came the girl's plea. "I—I simply can't ride any farther."

"You've got to," came her companion's inexorable retort. "I know you're tired and sore, miss, but 'tisn't a patch on how you'd feel if some Cheyennes were to cut our trail. No. It wouldn't be safe for us to really halt short o' the south fork o' Dismal River. Keep goin'!" Emphasizing his warning, the ex-Confederate lashed his black and white pony to a fresh burst of speed, at the same time steeling himself against tears which, starting from the girl's great eyes, slid slowly down over the pale sheen of her cheeks.

"That's it! You're doin' mighty well!" he cried, more than a little impressed with her courage. "Keep it up a little while longer. The Indians would never reckon we've ridden straight north into Sioux territory—they'll be lookin' for us to the south."

"For Heaven's sake stop," Mistress Valcour burst out after another half hour of furious riding beneath the cold and distant stars. "My legs are raw."

"It's better than the torture stake!" How little did she dream of the exquisite agonies the Cheyenne squaws could devise!

"Oh, I hate you!"

"There's no help for it," came the tall rider's inflexible reply. "I've got an arrow wound in my arm, and that don't feel like anythin' to brag about."

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On and on over the level, sagebrush-dotted plain the two fled from the scene of disaster while the stars swung ever higher in the heavens and far behind them the sound of rifle fire rose briefly and then faded away. Burton wondered on the fate of the fugitives.

When at last they came to an alder fringed creek and their hard ridden animals had splashed out knee deep, Burton reined in to breathe the ponies and to allow them a few mouthfuls of water. On the far bank the girl, who had slid off her mount, raised a defiant, quivering face.

"Go on and leave me!" she sobbed. "I—I don't care if the Indians do come—I—I won't ride any farther."

"We'll go on presently," not ungently insisted Burton as he also dismounted, to scoop up a few handfuls of water which was cool, but bitter with alkali. "Better take a drink and stretch out for a few minutes, then button those pants right and maybe you won't chafe so. Here, let me adjust those waist laces for you."

"Let me alone! Don't touch me!"

"You sure are mighty unreasonable," drawled Burton with deceptive indifference, then he carefully inspected the cinches of both rude saddles. "Out this way people are gen'rally grateful for having their lives saved." He fixed on her a calm, disapproving look. "If you hadn't been so shaken up in the wreck and might be just a little out of that pretty head of yours, reckon I'd spank you just to teach you a few manners."

"Spank me? Oh-h, you beast!" Outraged, the girl sprang to her feet and confronted him bravely enough, though her legs wavered with weariness.

"Ah! I understand—I shouldn't expect more from one of those dreadful Rebels who have brought such misery to our country. You are, I suppose, a typical Southern gentleman?"

TO Mistress Valcour's vast surprise, Robert Burton merely grinned, then he stooped and began to scour his long knife with some sand from the river bed. Good, he was successfully stinging her to fresh energy—to a renewed mental and physical effort. Kindness evidently could not evoke such a reaction.

"And you, I reckon, are a No'thern aristocrat?"

"Do you know who my father is?" stormed Mistress Valcour.

"Only that he's the father of a right pretty gal."

"He's Senator Valcour—chief promoter for the Union Pacific! He'll have you punished for this."

Wickeder grew Burton's smile and his silver mounted belt glinted faintly as he advanced.

"Punished for what, miss?"

She was aroused, all right, her rather square-shaped mouth set in exasperated lines. "For insulting me in the train; for ordering me about as if I were your body slave—and for pawing me when I was unconscious and unable to defend myself. Look at me!" And she indicated her ripped and tattered blouse. "The work of a cowardly beast!"

The enormity of her injustice stung him, so that he towered above her, his lean face dark with wrath.

"Paw you, eh? Well, miss, if I hadn't 'pawed you,' this"—he flicked a lock of her hair which hung in a heavy mantle to her waist—"would be decoratin' some Dog Soldier's lance right now. And," his teeth glinted in a hard smile, "if I ever were to 'paw you' I'd not take you unconscious—I like 'em to fight a little—makes things interestin'."

"Oh-h." And fear crept into her expression, silencing her bitter tongue.

Hardened by long years of war, calloused by the sight of too much human suffering, Robert Burton's scheme of things had undergone many alterations.

"Now let's understand each other." His features relaxed not a whit. "I think you're useless! One of those whimperin', soft-handed doll-women who set themselves up to sneer at girls who've heart and ambition enough to come out to this wilderness, fight Injuns, outlaws and the sun; who can love

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deeply enough to work and fight for their men and help settle this country." Carried away by the long strain of the past day, he went on. "You'll sho'ly be tickled to hear that I despise your sort—wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole, if 'twas to please myself. Your father's *dinero* and power don't rate deuce high with me. If this was back East I'd sho' ride off and let you find your own way home, but since it's not, reckon I'll have to see you into North Platte."

"I only regret that I am forced to be indebted to you—you will be well rewarded," the girl said in a stifled voice and there was a bewildered light in her eyes. Wanly, but dauntlessly, she faced him when he led up the ponies. "I am not going to mount for another hour."

"You're going now, if I have to tie you on."

"Oh, don't be so stupid, we've lost the Indians and I'm tired out."

"We may have lost those Indians," he corrected grimly, "but this country's alive with hostiles, and I've not got but two shots in this Colt. Do as I say."

"I won't."

As he bent to pick her up, Mistress Valcour brought her small hand stinging against his hollow cheek; but even as he straightened in fury she slumped forward on the damp sand quite unconscious.

"Poor little fool," he murmured as he splashed water onto the pallid marble of her face. "Too bad to drive her so hard."

"I—I'm sorry—and I've been most unreasonable," she whispered when she had presently returned to consciousness. Silently, she yielded to his insistence that they continue their flight.

BUT Jessica Valcour proved to be really too weak to sit her pony when once he lifted her on. She bent so far forward that the glittering banner of her hair became commingled with the coarse mane of the Cheyenne's pony. Thus she remained outlined against the stars until Burton swung up onto the larger and more powerful bay pony then, with arms surprisingly gentle, he swept her onto the pony before him.

"Now, miss," he directed, more than a little conscience-stricken, "just you put one arm 'round my neck."

In a gesture of exhausted surrender one slim arm crept up and then Jessica Valcour sank back into the sinewy hollow of his left arm, her small head tilted back and her delicate features reflecting the pale light of the stars.

Thus they rode on over the dwarfing immensity of the prairie, alone amid a breathless silence to which only the stamp and shuffle of hoofs afforded a relief.

Soon began the eerie pre-dawn howling of wolves and coyotes, and then dense coveys of quail and sage hens commenced to flush out of the sunburnt buffalo grass and sagebrush. As the light increased, the horizon moved continually farther away, revealing to the hollow-eyed rider a vista of dun-hued prairies, terminated here and there by a row of pale hills—hills which might have been sandbanks unnumbered ages ago when the glacial waters of Lake Algonquin had covered this nearly treeless region.

How far they had ridden during the night, Burton could only conjecture, but it must have been close on to forty miles and every fiber of his tough body ached with fatigue.

In an effort to forget the throb of his wounded arm, he fell to planning his next steps. In North Platte he'd clean himself up, buy some new clothes before he boarded the next train for Julesburg and then—smiling, he glanced down at his heavy haversack. How softly blue her eyes would shine when he gave Enid those glowing emeralds gotten in the sack of the governor's palace at Tezenbajo; how white would a certain strand of pearls gleam against her shapely throat. The diamonds he'd convert to cash—they ought to bring many stacks of golden coins which would start them off without having to scale that oft-underestimated barrier to happiness called poverty.

Thus he was musing when a distant noise drew his gaze to the left. He straightened

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a little in his saddle and glimpsed very far off to the left the rising of a puff of smoke —another. Indian signals? He reined in but presently caught the glimmer of the new sun's first rays on what must be a distant window.

Good! His senses of time and direction were functioning as well as ever. Yonder must lie North Platte, dying and deserted base camp for the U. P. and jumping-off place for its successor, wicked, murderous Julesburg, the newest "Hell on Wheels."

JACK SMILEY

Again his self-communing was interrupted when the girl's arms about his neck tightened and, drugged with sleep, she raised lips as soft and brightly red as though fashioned of scarlet satin.

"Kiss me—darling—" she murmured, and for the life of him Robert Burton never knew why, with a gay smile, he obeyed her.

CHAPTER VI.

JOURNEY'S END.

ONE of the passenger coach's wheels had a little flat spot which clacked regularly, maintaining a soothing rhythm which, however, had no effect on Captain Robert Burton. Each clack served as a reminder that there were so many less yards separating him from Enid Culver. Four years to a day since he had seen her on that last leave from Vicksburg.

On glancing through the long unwashed windows he could see a troop of dusty blue cavalry riding two and two along a road which ran parallel to the tracks. The poor devils in the rear platoon were eating dust, for all the handkerchiefs tied over their noses. How familiar a sight it was to see steel glinting from the pall of golden dust.

A quiet chuckle made him relax, to see lines of grave amusement on the red-brown visage of Colin MacKaye.

"Losh, mon, are you wushing to get at 'em?"

"No," Burton laughed. "But I reckon I'll sho'ly look twice at a blue uniform till the day of my death. Horses look like they're comin' back from patrolling the line."

"Aye. Aiblins they're replacements for the 2nd Cavalry— 'Twas a patrol o' them saved our lives last nicht. Losh, I'll no be quick forgetting the run I made for the last hundred yards. Every second I thocht to feel a ball or arrow in my backside, but the patrol came up in time. A pretty bicker it was for maist half an hour."

Absently Burton fingered a new sombrero bought in decaying North Platte. "I heard it in the distance— How many of you got through?"

"There was ainly three o' us, Rob. Yon big, fierce-swearin' sergeant and the black bearded trapper." MacKaye sighed. "The bloody de'ils caught yon poor brakeman just behind me, and they had his hair off before a mon could say 'MacGregor'!"

The taurine bellow of the conductor could be heard in the next car. "Julesburg in ten minutes! Julesburg in ten minutes!"

Chuckling, the Scot reached up to the luggage rack and took down a brown slouch hat. "I'd ha'e given a lot to have seen ye lugging yon hoity-toity Valcour lass. Ha! Ha! And both of ye hating the other!"

"Sho'—she just don't understand this country," the Southerner drawled. "Anyhow, I'll never see her again."

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"Dinna be so sure—I heard she was heading for Julesburg, too."

"Reckon she won't be bothered, not with her father a big politician and promoter of the road. Senator Valcour will be as rich as Midas, no doubt."

"He'll be nae so rich soon—I'm thinking," the Scot remarked and dodged the end of a huge duffle bag swinging past from a miner's shoulder.

"Why?"

"In Platte they were saying the U. P.'s nigh to bankruptcy," MacKaye stated soberly. "'Tis rumored Congress has refused mair subsidies unless the line reaches Big Spring within the month. The officer boy o' the troopers said it's near impossible what with the desert ahead, and the Cheyennes, Sioux and Crows harryin' the laborers. So, aiblins, yer proud beauty wilna be so proud come a month mair."

"Did anyone else agree?"

"Aye, the station master in North Platte. He told us while we were waiting for them to find your ugly carcass, he's so sure o' ruin he's looking around for a likely farm. 'Twas he that said old Senator Andrew Valcour has his last saxpence invested i' the road."

THE engineer whistled stridently for brakes as the train clattered by a village of fifteen or twenty teepees, around which squaws toiled in the brilliant sunshine and wolfish dogs scavenged while, a short way out on the prairie, small naked boys watched a herd of grazing ponies.

The couplings banged and rattled, dust swirled in the open windows through which could be seen a slow plodding 'bull train. The huge white tops of the freight wagons, glinting in the sun, marked the passage of a convoy headed for Julesburg or for Fort Sedgewick farther down the South Platte. How slowly the long horned, brown and white oxen moved, how dense was the cloud of snuff colored dust almost obliterating the hindermost wagons.

"Julesburg! All off. End o' line!" A brakeman thrust a beery, unshaven face in the door and in the same breath swore at a puff of wood smoke from the locomotive which curled about him. "Julesburg! Beware of pickpockets!"

"And everything else," grunted a fat little passenger in a stovepipe hat and checkered red waistcoat.

Julesburg! Just outside of this mushroom of canvas and raw board shacks was the Culver ranch. Enid! Joy inexpressible welled into Burton's heart. Enid at last!

A few minutes later Burton and MacKaye stepped out onto the crude earth platform of Julesburg amid the terrific noonday sunshine. At that instant the ex-Confederate experienced a strange sensation—it was as if he had contracted a mysterious fever. Energy—vital, elemental in quality—was in the air, written in all those broad, sunburnt faces. A free swing to the stride, a determined set to the shoulders. Vigorous were all the types, restless, rude and primitive—yet attuned to a new momentum that swept one along like a mighty current.

Differently, the Scot expressed the same idea. "Losh, Rob, and look at all the people. Are they not braw and lusty? And I thocht it was a wilderness oot here."

"It seems we're wrong, Mac," Burton muttered. "I sho' miscalculated, too."

The ex-Confederate found the scene before his eyes absolutely unique in his experience—more than that. There must have been at least two thousand people on hand to welcome the arrival of the noon train. All over the right-of-way swarmed soldiers off duty, dirty looking Indians with hard black eyes and clad in buckskins and gay blankets.

Present in great numbers were certain well dressed, pale faced gentlemen who gazed at the newcomers with chill and speculative eyes. There were shirtsleeved railroad men, brawny Irish baggage smashers and a host of picturesque loafers who cursed and scratched themselves while gaping at the descending passengers.

By an effort Burton pulled himself together. "Come, Mac, let's *andar* out of this. I must find Enid."

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MacKaye's hand closed on his arm and the Scot, with a chuckle, begged, "In a minute; aiblins ye'll be amused to watch this."

A FILE of sunburned soldiers, bayonets a-sparkle in the sun, were busy clearing a path to the last car of the train, and along this proceeded an infantry major in company with a gray haired man in a well fitting black coat and riding breeches. It chanced that Burton and his friend stood on a little rise and so could see over the heads of the crowd and thus obtained an excellent view of Jessica Valcour's appearance on the coach's platform. She was, he noted, more radiantly lovely than ever in a black costume which made the most of her pale features and slim waisted figure.

"Losh! So she had all yon car to herself," MacKaye commented when not another passenger appeared. "'Tis evidently somewhat to be a politician's bairn."

"She's not blue eyed," Burton corrected absently. "Her eyes are violet. Will you look at that!"

A bearded sergeant barked an order, the soldiers stiffened and presented arms and the crowd quieted somewhat to look on in frank curiosity when the gray haired man hurried forward.

"Oh! Father—" Her cry carried even to where the adventurer stood absently brushing dust from his red striped trousers. Jessica Valcour almost sprang from the lowest step into the old man's extended arms and, clear as a bell, her rich tones came once more. "Oh, father, I hope that silly little accident didn't upset you."

"Merciful Laird," muttered MacKaye, "and she called last nicht 'a silly little accident.' I canna tell whether she's clean daft or a verra braw lass."

Back down the path opened by the guard he who must be Senator Valcour led his daughter to a buggy drawn by two restless black thoroughbreds. A uniformed driver touched his hat as correctly as any of General the Honorable Sir Hubert MacKaye's coachmen back in gray, dour old Edinburgh.

A roar of raucous laughter burst from the crowd and made the hot air quiver. Even the engineer thrust his head out of his cab and guffawed.

"Dudes! English!"

"Lickspittle! Haw! Haw!"

"Give my best to the Queen!"

Burton felt MacKaye stiffen, but the Scot relaxed as quickly.

Their merriment became Homeric when a gambler in the act of assisting two handsome young trollops into a buckboard feigned great indignation to the bearded loafer holding the reins.

"Touch yer blasted hat," he roared. "Can't yer see their ladyships is comin' aboard?"

The gap toothed man in shirt sleeves stared, comprehended, and obeyed with mock civility.

The crowd howled with amusement, and angry hues flooded Jessica Valcour's cheeks, but neither the promoter nor the infantry major paid any attention. Even Burton chuckled.

"Come on, Mac, let's be getting on to the post office."

They found it across a wide and dusty street directly opposite the Casement Brothers' huge portable warehouse, but so swamped with business was it that the impatient captain was forced to join a long line leading to a small, heavily barred window. While they waited, Burton absently scanned a fly-blown collection of handbills advertising the rates of Holladay's Overland Stage and the charges of Messrs. Russel, Majors & Waddel, freighters. Besides these there were the notices of real estate sharks and dozens of "Wanted, Dead or Alive!" posters from the U. S. marshal's office.

A singularly unpleasant voice impinged upon Burton's ears. "Yer seen that new gal of Jack Smiley's?" The speaker was a flushed, bottle-nosed individual with a weeping walrus mustache.

"Hope to kiss a pig if I didn't, Hank," replied a narrow faced individual who looked like a human weasel. "By Gawd, she's shore prettier'n a speckled pup. I

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ain't seen such purty yaller hair since I was knee high to a pra'rie dog. Jed Parkins was sayin' Jack really got spliced to her. That gospel?"

"Jack married? Haw! Haw!" sniggered Walrus Mustache. "They's been three Missus Jack Smileys since the U. P. rolled out o' Columbus. Jack's shore got a handy way with the frails."

"Why shouldn't he? He c'n afford it. Heard say the King of the Hills is easy makin' him five thousand a night."

"Wal, some people shore are shot in the tail with luck," grunted the first speaker and shuffled on towards the little window. "Yessiree, that noo gal o' Jack's shore gives cards and spades to all the others, or I'm a greaser. She's got class, this one has."

FINALLY it was Burton's turn at the window and, heart in mouth, he asked the collarless, squint eyed postmaster about the Culvers.

"Culver?" he said vaguely. "Culver?"

"Yes." A twing of apprehension made Burton speak sharply. "Of course you know George Culver. He runs a rancho near here."

The other grinned, spat expertly at a cuspidor behind him. "Culver, oh, yes—He was here before the railroad come."

Almost husky with joy, Burton pursued his inquiry. "Do you know whether Miss Enid Culver is in town or out at the ranch?"

"Miss Culver? Say," the postmaster's bloodshot blue eyes narrowed a little, "you ain't a feller called—Benton—no—Burton, air ye?"

"Why, yes. Did Miss Culver leave any message?" Painful was the thumping of Burton's heart.

"Why, I — no—" the postmaster drawled. "I jest guessed who ye were. She used to post letters to ye—and you used to send her some with funny stamps onto 'em, didn't ye?"

"Yes." Burton's smile widened. "Where is she now?"

The postmaster blinked and caught up a package of letters. "Reckon you might find her over to the Julesburg House, mister. She was thar yesterday. All right, next!"

Burton turned away in a seventh heaven of anticipation and the postmaster began to drop packages of letters into the pouch of a mail orderly from Fort Sedgewick.

"All right, Rob?" inquired the Scot, his blue eyes very solicitous.

"Right as rain— Come on, you old Chinchero!"

Of the busy, restless crowds, Captain Robert Burton saw nothing, and it seemed he trod on a velvet carpet inches deep. It was only MacKaye's alertness that saved him from being trampled by a group of screeching, half drunken cowboys who came galloping recklessly down Julesburg's deeply rutted main street and waving half empty pint bottles.

"Losh, what a toon!" MacKaye grunted when, at a doorway, appeared two painted and daubed women clad only in pink chemises. These hailed in piercing tones to offer their charms in no uncertain terms. A few strides farther down a boardwalk the bleached and bedizened inmates of dance hall came running out, passed their arms through those of the newcomers and cried:

"In town for a spree, boys? Come in, buy Mimi and Lottie a drink. Aw, don't be shy, boys; let's get acquainted. We're only young once!"

Energy! Even in its lower strata the new West seethed with it. No pale inhibitions, no strangling if refining traditions here. All was for to-day and to-morrow. Yesterday was lost in a nameless grave.

By the time the unpainted board façade of the Julesburg House was seen down the main street, the long-striding, soldierly companions had been accosted no less than a dozen times. They were passing the Golden Queen saloon when staccato shots and a hoarse scream of mortal pain rang from its depths, bringing inescapably home the fact that death as well as life was swift in "Hell on Wheels."

But for the moment the significance was lost on Robert Burton. Striding along with

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the inimitable swing of a cavalryman afoot, he hitched the precious haversack higher on his shoulder, tramped by the row of cow ponies and cavalry chargers which drowsed or gnawed idly at a hitching rail and headed towards a series of broad steps leading to the Julesburg House. Enid! *Would* she be there?

On the porch sat several women, some of them in decent, somber colored dresses, others in the gayer frilled garments of Lilith's daughters. At the sight of every wide skirt, of every bonnet, Burton's heart lifted like that of one who, on a swing, feels it reach the apex of its arc and pause that breathless second before it begins its downward swoop.

With characteristic tact, Colin MacKaye turned aside at the door and gently clapped his friend's buckskinned shoulder.

"I'm thinkin', Rob, I'll e'en go and sample a specimen o' the local whusky. Aiblins you and the bonnie lassie will ha'e somewhat to talk aboot. Ye'll find me at yon Blue Star."

And so the gallant, rawboned third son of the MacKaye of Glenkaye turned aside and was gone even before Burton could utter a half-hearted protest.

WITH the same peculiar tingling in his fingertips he had felt on the eve of Corinth, Captain Burton automatically straightened his hunting shirt, wiped off the new sombrero and with a peculiar clutching at his muscular throat he swung up the steps and entered the sudden gloom of a rudely furnished lobby. He was about to cross to the reception desk when, through a near-by door, he glimpsed the back of a girl's golden head. Though she was bent over a writing desk and with her back turned, his whole being told him it was Enid Culver. No mistaking the glorious silver-gold sheen of her hair, no mistaking the smoothness of the nape of her neck.

Heart drumming like a partridge's wings, Burton sped across the gritty, carpetless floor and entered the stuffy little writing room. She did not look up and her pen went on scratching evenly across the paper. He had to make a deliberate effort to speak.

"Enid," he choked.

Her pen stopped in mid-motion as if the hand of an invisible giant had halted it.

"Enid, my own darlin'!"

Enid Culver uttered a breathless gasp, sprang up and stood facing him, expressive gray-blue eyes wide and her bright mouth parted in astonishment.

"Oh, my own honey!" In an instant his long, hungry arms enfolded her soft suppleness, just as he had imagined on so many hundreds of nights when he lay in bivouac under the hot stars and velvety skies of old Mexico. Dizzily, he sensed the well-remembered fragrance of her hair in his nostrils and felt the tremulous warmth of her lips. His body seemed to melt inside and his brain went whirling dizzily through realms of ecstasy.

A hand fell cruelly pinioning his shoulder. "Say, you!"

Spun off balance, Robert Burton swayed and caught a glimpse of a tall man with a strong square face that was dominated by pointed mustaches and small eyes that were keen and as evilly blue as dagger points. No puma could have struck faster or harder than Robert Burton. One of his fists dealt the blond aggressor a jarring blow under the heart, and a split second later the other caught him a tooth rattling *smack* on the side of the jaw. But nevertheless the blond man remained on his feet.

With a wholly primitive viciousness, the raging Burton pressed his attack, ignoring Enid's low wails of dismay until, at last, the other went over backwards with a resounding crash. His fall knocked over a desk and an inky spray spattered the garish wall paper. Quite unconscious, Burton's attacker lay on his back, the skirts of his black frock coat hung out like grotesque sable wings; and suddenly revealed were the mother of pearl butts of two derringers, protruding from the pockets of a waistcoat of flowered yellow silk.

"You swine! Get up—" Burton thun-

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dered, but the blond man remained motionless, so he stooped and snatched out the weapons. Only then did he turn, flushed and apologetic. "I'm sorry, honey, I couldn't help it," he panted and tried to take her arm, but she shrank away.

"Oh, Bob, Bob! You shouldn't have hit him. He—he'll kill you. You—don't know who he is—"

"I've killed other men," Burton's tones flicked like a whip lash, "and I'll kill him as soon as he can stand on his feet."

"But you—mustn't. You—you don't understand." Ghastly pale, Enid backed away, holding out trembling hands. "Oh, go away," she moaned, "please go."

"Go away! Did you say *go away?*" A glacial current seemed to have supplanted the blood in Burton's veins. Nonsense, Enid Culver couldn't be telling him to go away!

Immensely tall he looked as he crossed to stand before her, red striped blue legs a little apart, and with that heavy haversack still dragging at his left shoulder.

"Go away? Honeybird, you didn't mean that—"

"You must go," she wailed, her face distorted with terror. "That—is Jack Smiley—my husband!"

CHAPTER VII.

BURTON CELEBRATES.

"YOUR husband!" It seemed as if one of those thousands of shells Burton had watched burst was now exploding inside of him, blasting out his life, withering his stomach, bowels and lungs. "Your husband!" he repeated and all of a sudden the haversack seemed to weigh incalculable amounts.

"Yes," unexpectedly the girl blazed at him as women will when tortured by their own acts. "It's all your fault! C-can't you see? Father and Paul were killed by the Crows—I—I got tired of waiting and waiting—growing older, having no life—no love."

Love! Burton swayed, but she railed on.

"Jack was here; he was good to me!" With a wild flurry of dove-gray skirts, Enid Culver darted across the room to catch up the big, brutally handsome blond head into her lap and crouch there gazing up in illogical defiance at her anguished lover.

"Oh, you fool," she wailed. "You unutterable fool! Why did you leave—go off to Mexico like that? Do you think I'm growing any younger?"

"But—" his tongue seemed to be fashioned of thick felt, "but you promised, and I was getting money for us." He made a stricken, half gesture to the haversack. "I joined Maximilian—fought—"

"Fight!" Savagely her accents rang out and it seemed she could grow no paler and yet keep consciousness. "Yes, that's all you're good for—that's all you'll ever be, a down-at-the-heel soldier of fortune! I'm sick and tired of work. You know I've slaved ever since I was old enough to walk. Look at my hands now." She held them out trembling, ridiculously small, white, and covered with gems. "Oh, I—" At the agony in his deep-set gray eyes she faltered and broke off short.

"But—I—why—you wrote less than six months ago." The words issued painfully from his sun cracked lips, as though each one was being dragged out by a windlass. "You told me you still—if you had only said—" He again made small, ineffectual motions with his muscular, long fingered hands as he read the change written there in her features. She was still Enid, but unfamiliar now. Why? He realized that her hair was arranged in a new and alluring mode; her dress was a little too revealing of curves which had matured since last he left her, slender half child, half girl. What was it she was saying?

"Get out, you fool! Get out! Jack will kill you when he comes to. Get out! You poor romantic fool!"

From behind sounded a loud trample of feet and in the writing room door appeared a thick bodied fellow in shirt sleeves and with black hair slicked flat with bear's grease. Other faces, startled, strangely incredulous, loomed over his shoulders.

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"My Gawd!" he rasped in awed tones. "Why, *the fool's hit Jack!*"

"What! Knocked out Jack Smiley?"

A hint of awe invaded the hot and curious faces peering in at the door. Apparently it was something to have knocked out Jack Smiley.

The black haired man's hand started to creep towards his food spotted waistcoat, which successfully roused Burton from his agonized stupor. In a deadly calm now he spun on one heel and in his right hand a long barreled Colt .44 materialized as by a conjuring trick.

"Stand back!" he commanded, and before the savage glare in his eyes the crowd fell back. In his ears a name was dinning like a fire alarm's insistent clatter. Jack Smiley? Jack Smiley? Where had he heard that name? In a flash returned a vision of the walrus mustached cattleman gossiping in the post office. Snatches of his conversation returned. "Jack Smiley's newest sweetheart—" "They married?" "No, three 'Mrs. Smileys' since—Columbus—"

Burton's voice rang out again, this time harsh as the caw of a raven.

"Reckon we've both made a mistake, Enid," he cried, hitching higher his haversack. "Only I've found out mine in time—good luck to you—" And then he shoved aside the black haired man and marched out, leaving Enid Culver numbly crouched above the inert form of her protector.

AN ominous crowd had already gathered in the Julesburg House's stuffy little living room and women of all sorts were scurrying to shelter, but the noisiest talkers fell silent or lowered their voices to an indistinct mumble when they beheld Death looking out through the eyes of this bronzed young fellow in the red striped breeches.

On the hotel's threshold the captain stopped, laughed stridently and called out, "Come on, everybody! Drinks on me! I'm invitin' you-all to the Golden Queen, and we'll drink—drink, by God, as none of you've ever drunk before!"

At each stride the mad turmoil raging in Robert Burton's soul increased with a cumulative effect much as a brook, fed by freshets, first stirs uneasily, then grows magically until it becomes a raging, all-destroying torrent; so the black despair in the ex-Confederate's brain grew.

In frenzied gayety he slammed apart the swinging doors of the Golden Queen.

"Drinks!" he yelled in that far carrying parade ground voice which had marshalled so many gray battalions into line of battle. "Come on, friends, name your poison—everybody drinks! I aim to get rid of thirty thousand dollars before midnight."

In vain did Colin MacKaye, running thunderstruck and dismayed out of the Blue Star, clutch his friend by the arm and hoarsely demand what had happened. In vain did he plead with this frozen faced man not to fling away the hard earned spoils of war.

Glass in hand, Burton only laughed harshly and looked at his friend.

Roaring with delight they came; loafer, teamster, gambler, capper and section hand. Sweating, shouting and swearing joyously, they crowded in until the Golden Queen could hold no more, and Burton drank, matching drinks with all and sundry. But for all the effect the raw red whisky had upon him it might have been tea. One by one he tossed magnificent, flawless diamonds gashing onto the bar, and at each one the motley throng clamored like a starved wolf pack at the sight of meat.

"Oh, mon, mon! Dinna do this," MacKaye pleaded. "There's no wumman in the world worth sic madness!"

"Shut up, you." A ruffian with a bruised looking face waggled a pistol under the Scot's nose. "Let him spend—he's havin' an aces-up time for his *dinero*."

Cases of champagne fired volleys of corks up to the raw pine rafters, then sent their golden contents sparkling across the bar, and the haversack was half empty when the last bottle was drained.

"What! No more champagne?" Bur-

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ton cried, and abandoned his efforts to tuck a champagne cork into the beribboned sleeve of a pretty, tired-looking dance hall girl. "It's an outrage!"

"Come on over to the Prairie Belle," the girl whispered in his ear. "More room there. This place has been drunk dry."

"A good idea," he agreed owlishly, but when she tried to slip an arm around Burton's neck he shook her off impatiently. Several ugly free fights were raging, so it was with difficulty that he, ever watched by the appalled Scotsman, gained the door. Apparently the clamor had drowned out his latest invitation, for no one had the wit to follow him, and villainous raw liquor usually reserved for soldiers and Indians, was still pouring across the scarred bar top in a steady stream.

OUT into the sunset Burton wavered, and there he paused to laugh, emitting mirthless mechanical sounds such as certain birds and animals make. Great God! Yesterday at this time he'd been riding along, maundering over Enid Culver. A romantic fool! She was right! That's what he was. She had hit the mark that time.

"Come, mon, ha'e you done wi' yer madness?" Deep anxiety was written in MacKaye's eternally red face. "Dinna throw awa' the rest o' yer siller."

"Sorry, Mac, but I'm going to make this day just as horrible as I can. There's merit in consistency, they tell me."

The two were half way across the wide main street when a buggy suddenly pulled up before them, and Captain Robert Burton, his face flushed, found himself looking into the familiar features of Jessica Valcour. She sat with a uniformed orderly by her side.

"Captain Burton, I—I was looking for you."

With ironic grace, Robert Burton bowed from the waist—that same courtly kind of a bow his ancestors had made back in Virginia—before they had heard the call of Empire and had struck out for the rich wildernesses of Kansas.

"I—I came to ask if you would dine at the Fort to-morrow with my father and me. I—" at the queer intensity of his look she flushed, dropped her eyes and stammered, "I feel I owe you an apology."

"Captain Burton will be delighted to go," MacKaye hastily cut in, and nudged his friend when Burton made no immediate reply.

"Reckon I'll come, all right," Burton drawled as he fought to forget the rending pain in his heart, "if you still want me to-morrow."

The girl stiffened and obviously fought down a sharp retort. "We shall expect you then at seven to-morrow night. We Valcours are given to keeping our word. Drive on, Perkins."

Nettled by a flick of the orderly's whip, the black thoroughbreds surged on and the buggy vanished around the stern of a lumbering Conestoga wagon, and so Jessica Valcourt heard nothing of Burton's strident laughter which MacKaye made no effort to stop. He was listening with a very grave expression to the words of an army officer, a lieutenant with soft brown sideburns, who stepped up and said in a hurried undertone:

"Get your friend out of town!"

"He'll no run awa'," MacKaye replied.

"But *you must!*" urged the other in deadly seriousness. "If you're his friend, *get* him out of Julesburg drunk or sober. Jack Smiley runs Julesburg, and your friend has beat him to a pulp, they tell me. Get him away at once—it's his only chance."

There was no mistaking the earnestness of the bronzed young officer's plea.

"But are there no police?" the Scot was amazed. "Ha'e ye no law here?"

"None save that of the gamblers and their six-guns." The young officer looked nervously about as he added, "There are two or three hundred toughs in this town—all owe Smiley a favor of some kind. Boot Hill's humpbacked with poor devils who haven't done a tenth of what your friend has—"

Once the friendly officer had hurried off,

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MacKaye manfully tried to reason with the somber eyed stranger Robert Burton had become, but he merely laughed and swung on across the dusty road towards the Prairie Belle.

"By auld Clootie, to pass him oot is the only way," the Scot murmured. "Then, aiblins—"

At the more spacious bar of the Prairie Bell, Burton plunged even more furiously into his insane prodigality, despite a natural revulsion that flowed back against his will, as mist from a waterfall rises in the opposite direction to the cataract.

By now word had gone all over Julesburg that the madman who had knocked Jack Smiley unconscious was resuming his spree, and a steady, ill smelling stream of inhabitants hurried to join in lapping up the flood of alcohol decanted at the Prairie Belle.

WHEN the sun sank in its usual burst of breath-taking glory, and the kerosene lamps began to cast a red-yellow glare over the swarm of hot and loud voiced humans, hairy, red faced men fought, rough fellows with calloused hands sang, painted women giggled and picked pockets, and certain hard-eyed citizens lured drunken simpletons into games of chance.

Slouched on a chair placed on the bar, haversack between knees and presiding over all the raucous carnival sat Captain Robert Burton. Drink after drink he tossed off, but their only effect was to deepen his color and to add a more somber glow to his eyes.

Beneath the chair stood Colin MacKaye, very erect, hand on gun, and his anguished blue eyes searching the crowd for a possible murderer. Discordant music burst from a disheveled orchestra in a far corner and the garish saturnalia rolled on towards its climax.

It was near midnight that Captain Robert Burton's uncertain fingers, on delving into the haversack, scraped its bottom and encountered but two objects. One was the gem of the whole collection, a necklace of superb emeralds; the other, a jeweled comb which had once graced the shapely head of a Mexican peeress.

"Here! Look—all of you!"

A shout went up when the bareheaded ex-Confederate rose unsteadily to his feet and, his head brushing the rafters, stared down through the miasma of smoke veiling the Prairie Belle.

"For the ladies!" he shouted, and held the necklace on high. "Ladies forward!"

A deep roar of excitement drowned out all other noises, then the throng surged forward, fascinated.

"Give it to me!" "No! Give it to me!" "Stand back, you bleached hussy."

A swarm of cursing, pushing dance hall girls fought their way up to the very foot of the bacchanalian throne. Hungrily they eyed the prize—pled for it, slobbered, whined and wheedled. Hands tipped by writhing fingers, hands brown, red and white, clawed upwards, but Burton, laughing contemptuously only held the gorgeous necklace higher.

"Quiet! Quiet!" he roared then paused undecided until, standing apart from the crowd, he glimpsed a girl clad in the yellow, short-skirted costume. Unhappy, apparently out of place, she stood quite alone, staring up at the gaunt spendthrift with a curiously puzzled look. Odd, but her small and clearly modelled features seemed to have breeding in them.

"Oh, Rob! Rob!" MacKaye implored in a final effort to retrieve something from the wreck of Burton's fortune, "dinna throw awa' yon bauble. 'Tis worth a gude ten thousand."

Jabbering, intrigued, the crowd fell back when Robert Burton, after having tossed the jewelled comb to the bartender, leaped to the floor. His long face might have been carved from oak, so brown and hard was it when he drove his way through the throng and halted before the sable haired girl in yellow. She flinched before the stark tragedy in his eyes and started to shrink away, then, as if she remembered something, she forced a dreadful, mechanical smile and faltered.

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"Evenin', honey—can I—may I—?"

Her voice died away in a sharp click when Bedford Forrest's captain bowed his quaint, Old World bow and said, "For you, Miss—Miss—?"

"Lulu Jameson," supplemented a hoarse voice. "A brand new gal round here."

"In you, Miss Lulu, I pay honor to the whole of your lovely and fascinating sex!" And while cheers, mingled with the snarls of disappointed women, rang in his ears, Burton clasped the necklace of green fire about Lulu's neck. To his numbed surprise he watched the painted smile fade, saw her lips tremble and two tears slide slowly over her faintly rouged cheeks.

A shout was rising from the crowd: "King and Queen o' Julesburg! King an' Queen o' Julesburg! Get 'em a coach! A buggy—anything!"

NOW that the last of the jewels was gone, Burton's reserve cracked and he flung an arm about the slim waist of the girl in yellow, crying, "Come on, honeybunch. You're my queen tonight, let's go!"

Out into the street poured the shaggy saturnalia, shouting, fighting and laughing. Shots were fired into the air somewhere near at hand. A buggy was found and into it the rough men and painted women bundled Burton and Lulu Jameson. Other Cyprians and dance hall girls clambered onto the buggy's floor or stood on the steps kicking high in the air and kissing all and sundry. Amid a fresh salvo of shots, the rout commenced to reel down the main street.

"By the great leapin' Moses, never was a nig't like thish be-fore," bellowed a drunken prospector. "C'mon, Ted—le's watch the fun."

"Ki yi-yi!" whooped a scarlet faced cowboy. "I'm a lobo wolf from the Brazos an' it's my night to howl!" And, throwing back his head, he did so very realistically.

"Never gonna see so much fizzy again," babbled a soldier who swayed along while from his pocket protruded long necks of two or three champagne bottles. "Come on, baby!"

In front of the triumphant carriage capered an enormous, red bearded bull whacker who, at regular intervals, leaped high into the air, cracked his heels and screeched, "Ho-o-raw f'r Bully Burton, the bhoy wid a heart o' gold."

And so the mad parade swayed on towards the prairie on the edge of town where stood the homes of the wealthier citizens.

Burton, laughing crazily, sat, one booted foot cocked on the buggy's dash-board, with one arm about Lulu Jameson's waist and with the other waving a champagne bottle.

Suddenly a light flared at the second floor window of one of the larger houses, and Burton's glazing eyes made out a single figure which, as the buggy was dragged by not thirty feet away, peered out with affrighted eyes. He dimly recognized Jessica Valcour, so he rose to his feet, swept off his sombrero and made a deep bow.

"See you to-morrow!" he yelled, and then sank back into that unconsciousness which awaits men who have absorbed far too much alcohol.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HANGING.

FIVE thousand imps, it seemed, were beating on Robert Burton's temples with red-hot sledges, and his tongue felt even thicker and drier than it had when he got lost in the terrible deserts of Sonora. Little by little, a measure of confused consciousness returned, and with it a great perplexity. Where was he? Why did his head hurt so infernally? And that arrow wound in his arm was throbbing like the devil. If only the giddy rushing of something in his head would stop. Presently he perceived it was a bed he lay upon; a bed neither hard nor uncomfortable.

Gradually it all came back to him. Enid! His insane eagerness to be rid of all which might remind him of her and the incurable

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wound she had dealt him. Though his stomach seemed to be inhabited by swarms of butterflies, he finally succeeded in opening his eyes to find himself looking up at the resinous beams and raw shingles of a roof.

Lord, how his head throbbed! What a childish idiot he'd been! He felt as a man feels who begins to convalesce from a delirious sickness. The devil! He'd best be stirring—Smiley was evidently not of the type to wait for an enemy to make the opening move. Smiley! His muscles contracted a little at a reminiscence of that scene in the writing room of the Julesburg House.

But where was he? By exerting a huge effort he got up on one elbow and found himself to be lying, fully dressed, on top of a clean green counterpane.

Judging from the bare little chest of drawers and a horsehide trunk, this must be the Jameson girl's own retreat. It bothered him that he did not remember how he had come here, nor where he had gotten that lump on the back of his head.

Moving with extreme caution, Burton got to his feet and smiled to see that his Colt and pistol belt were slung from the back of a near-by chair. Of his new sombrero there was no trace—which was not surprising. No fool, Robert Burton knew the thing for him was to get out of Julesburg as quickly and as quietly as possible; to stay probably was to be murdered.

He tiptoed away from the bed, and in passing noticed a basin of water, a cloth and a bottle of arnica. So? The Jameson girl had evidently washed him off and bathed that bump on the back of his head.

He found a hollow, resounding stair and cautiously descended it to the rear of what appeared to be a small warehouse. Inside, he could discern stacked dry goods of all kinds, bales of blankets, rows of lanterns, stacks of horse collars, bales of ready-made coats, boxes of caps, hats and shoes. From the front of this emporium he heard sounds of activity and therefore hurried off into the early morning stillness—the sun was not yet up.

After rubbing eyes which felt like red-hot marbles set into his skull he fell to planning. First he'd get something to eat, and then he'd hunt up MacKaye. He studied Julesburg for the first time, sanely, dispassionately, and noted that, at this early hour, the boom town lay largely quiescent, with all its tawdriness and false pretense pitilessly revealed.

A jackass over beyond the railroad began to bray just as he started for a grubby little lunchroom near the freight depot where the mounds of railroad supplies loomed like man-made hills against the glory of the sky.

MECHANICALLY, he felt in his pockets. Nothing. Even his gold seal ring bearing a crest brought from England by his cavalier ancestors was missing.

"Jameson girl might have left me that," he murmured, and was sobered by the realization that once more he faced life with no more assets than the clothes on his back, a good shooting eye, and a decidedly mediocre Colt .44.

"That means I'll have to find Mac before breakfast," he decided, and set off behind the row of houses forming Julesburg's main thoroughfare. Here and there he came upon drunkards snoring in the lee of lumber piles, or out in the open where they had chanced to fall.

Where would he be likely to find MacKaye?

He halted a much befreckled barefoot boy who carried a milk pail over one arm and a battered stool in the other.

"Gee, mister," the boy called, "if yer hurry ye can see it!"

"See what?"

"They's goin' to be a swell hangin' right soon. Wisht I could go, but, dang the luck, I gotta milk that blamed old cow—paw will frale me plenty fervent if I don't."

Despite his throbbing head, Burton was a little appalled at the youth's eagerness. "A hanging! You ought to be glad you're goin' to miss it."

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The boy stared and then spat in braggadocio. "Glad? No, I ain't; I seen easy twenty-five of thirty hangings round this town, and this is fixin' to be a peach. Ol' Jack Smiley's sheriffs know how to put on a swell necktie party."

"What had this fellow done?" inquired the man in the red striped breeches—quite without intending to.

"I dunno. Teddie Jennifer 'lowed this hombre was eatin' down at Sis Jackson's resteraw when a no-'count feller by the name o' Dirkin comes in and sets fer to pick a fight with the stranger. Well, this here stranger feller seed he had to fight, so him and Dirkin cut loose together, and Dirkin got plugged. Then some depooty sheriffs jumped the stranger and they've took him off down the road."

Burton, despite the hardening of recent years, felt a sense of shock; imagine a boy like this holding human life so cheaply.

"Tell me," he inquired, "have you heard or seen anything of a tall, red faced man with blue eyes and a scar across his left cheek?"

The freckled boy's eyes widened. "You mean a feller wearin' one o' them funny Greaser belts with silver and blue stones onto it?"

"Yes." Burton felt relieved—he had been just a bit worried. "Where did you see him?" Then something in the lad's manner made him clutch the urchin by a ragged, blue-cotton shoulder.

"Why—why, good God, mister," he stammered, and backed away a step, "that's the feller them sheriffs is fixin' to hang!"

It was as if a fist had hit Burton at the base of his brain, and in an instant the last fogs were dispelled. "Which way'd they go? Quick!"

"Down 'long the railroad track 'bout half a mile out o' town." A grimy, wart speckled hand indicated the direction. "They's a passel o' cottonwoods down yonder where most of the hangin's take place."

His head at once a seething cauldron, and yet an efficiently throbbing piece of mechanism, Burton dashed down the main street and, throwing caution to the winds, established an undeniable claim to the attentions of a "necktie party" by appropriating the fastest-looking horse he could find among a group hitched to a rail outside a grain dealer's office.

OATHS and an outraged shout pursued the ex-Confederate as he swung into the saddle to drive his spurred heels home with a vicious jab and race past the Prairie Belle, the Julesburg House and the rest of the raw habitations. Once out on the prairie he again and again jabbed the really fast animal he had seized until it put on a furious burst of speed that made the wind tear by his ears and set the long thrums of his hunting shirt to fluttering like ragged battle flags in a breeze; yet he felt it was a snail he bestrode.

As he rode he checked his revolver. MacKaye! Colin MacKaye! Of course his gaunt Scotch friend was still all right. He'd get there in time and there'd soon be a smart skirmish; if there weren't too many of Smiley's men, well—in a few moments he'd know.

Bent low like a jockey, begrudging every inch of resistance to the wind, he urged the black at an arrow-like speed through low clumps of dewy sagebushes.

Endless ages seemed to elapse before the yellow-green tops of some cottonwoods showed beyond a bend in the dusty trail he followed. That must be the grove the boy had mentioned, for several horsemen had but recently passed this way; a fact proved by fresh prints seen dark against the dim colored earth. Off to his right the harassed rider thought to hear the jingle of a bridle chain and the trample of a cavalcade riding slowly along, but his attention remained trained upon the outline of those cottonwoods which were momentarily showing up in more detail.

Abruptly the trail swung around a rise, then led under a low swinging cottonwood branch, and so he galloped into the outskirts of the grove. Eyes darting about like thrusting rapiers, he drew back the

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cold steel of his Colt's hammer, braced himself for quick thinking and quicker shooting.

The black horse's splendid speed carried him into the shade of the first tall cottonwoods almost before he knew it. Frantically his eyes raked the spaces between the rough gray-brown trunks. Ha! Yonder stood a couple of tethered broncos, and beside them two men in argument over an object one of them held. A red mist whirled before Burton's eyes when he recognized the disputed object to be MacKaye's silver and turquoise belt. The two stiffened when they beheld the deadly eyed apparition and leaped aside.

Sunlight gleamed briefly on a barrel when the man nearest whipped up a rifle and sent a bullet moaning by Burton's ear. A split second later the gray faced horseman's Colt spat flame and he with stubby Wesson rifle screamed and staggered sidewise, clutching at the side of a soiled, red checked shirt.

Where was MacKaye? The rider could see nothing of his friend, so he abandoned his first impulse to fling himself off and fight the other enemy on foot.

The black shied at the howling of the wounded man, and a second later a shot cracked from the left. Frozen with anger, Burton fired at a half seen, black hatted form crouched behind a clump of sun dried willows. He spurred straight towards the bush, and then, as the fellow stupidly sought a new protection, the ex-Confederate shot him down. The wounded man, a bullet in his groin, was screaming horribly, and Burton raised his voice to make the whole shadowy dell resound.

"Colin! Colin! For God's sake, where are you?"

There were apparently no more enemies near by, so he spurred forward among the rough, sun dappled boles. "Colin! Where are you?"

A SHADOW crossed his face, drew his attention upward, and then the hairs on the back of Robert Burton's neck squirmed and lifted. From a limb dangled a hideously contorted figure—a form at once familiar and unfamiliar. God! Could that dreadful purplish face be that of Colin MacKaye, the gallant gentleman who had stood so sturdily beside him during three long years of strife?

Already shaken, Burton's nerves almost snapped when, in an instinctive but forlorn hope he forced his frightened mount to approach the appalling, gently swaying object. No use—those glassy eyes told that the MacKaye of Glenkaye's third son had departed on the Eternal journey.

"Too late! Too late!" demonic voices dinned in the anguished ex-Confederate's ears and assaulted his reason. Then louder, more real voices impinged upon his torment. "Which way did he go?"

"That way! See his hoss's tracks!"

Through a gap in the trees Burton caught a glimpse of Jack Smiley's cruelly handsome yellow head agleam in the new sunlight as, hatless, he headed a small swarm of riders galloping furiously back along the route by which he must have quitted the cottonwood grove.

Fury indescribable seethed in Robert Burton's soul. Twice within twenty-four hours had the same man robbed him of what was nearest and dearest—Kill! *Kill!* Kill! His first and well nigh irresistible impulse was to charge straight at Smiley and, come what might, exact the one just payment. A calmer inner instinct, born of his tumultuous existence, however, told him he would never live to reach Julesburg's unofficial, but unquestioned overlord.

Even as Burton reined aside there now arose from another side of the glade a new and equally menacing clamor. "Horse thief! Horse thief! Cut him off, you in there!"

The cold sweat of anguish standing out on his bronzed forehead, Burton wrenched the black around on its hind legs and dropped low over his neck when a shower of bullets came hissing through the branches. He could hear them going *tacot! tchuk!* into near-by trunks and branches. Ahead of him twigs and green

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leaves came sailing lazily through the air as he rode headlong for a break in the trees.

Glancing over his shoulder, Burton counted some fifteen or twenty riders, whooping and yelling like fox hunters, coming tearing out of the cottonwoods and, foremost of all, galloped Smiley, easily recognizable by his bare yellow head.

It was treacherous under foot because countless gopher and prairie dog holes formed just so many traps for the gelding's flying hoofs, but luckily the fugitive's stolen horse proved surefooted above the average. Before two miles of flat or gently rolling prairie flashed by, the chase had become strung out in a long line at the head of which Smiley still rode. Next, bunched well together, came three individuals who rode bent low, and after them a lengthening line of riders.

A fierce hope began to fill Burton's heart. Possibly, when Enid's paramour and MacKaye's principal murderer was far enough separated from the rest, he could wheel quickly and then perhaps the atrocity of the cottonwoods would not burn so terribly in his soul.

It was after the three riders behind Smiley had fallen back a good bit that the yellow haired gambler commenced to close in more rapidly on his quarry, unaware that Burton gradually and without seeming to was checking the black.

When half a mile more of dry prairie had flickered by, and over his shoulder the fugitive could make out details of a strong red face seen over the bay's ears, he drew a long breath, wheeled, and was starting back when, to his amazement, he discovered that Smiley had already turned and was retreating towards his companions.

"Yellow, after all! How could Enid fall for such a creature?" But when he beheld the trio also wheel and ride madly back towards Julesburg, the ex-Confederate's puzzlement grew and, ever cautious of an ambush, he reined in.

His heart leaped like a speared salmon. No wonder Smiley and his satellites were retreating for dear life! From a near-by gulch was pouring a disorderly column of Indians. They were too far off to tell to what tribe they belonged, but in all probability they were Northern Cheyennes, Kiowas on the war path, or a band of Sioux raiding south of their accustomed haunts. In any case they raised a long drawn cry and, amid billows of yellow dust, turned their ponies to head off the lone rider.

The Indians or Smiley? For an instant the grim featured rider hesitated. There was a chance he might shake off the Indians, while it meant sure death to turn back. Accordingly he headed towards a distant line of low hills which seemed to offer some sort of refuge. Purposefully, the Indians whipped their ponies, ceased their clamor and took up the interrupted chase on fresh animals.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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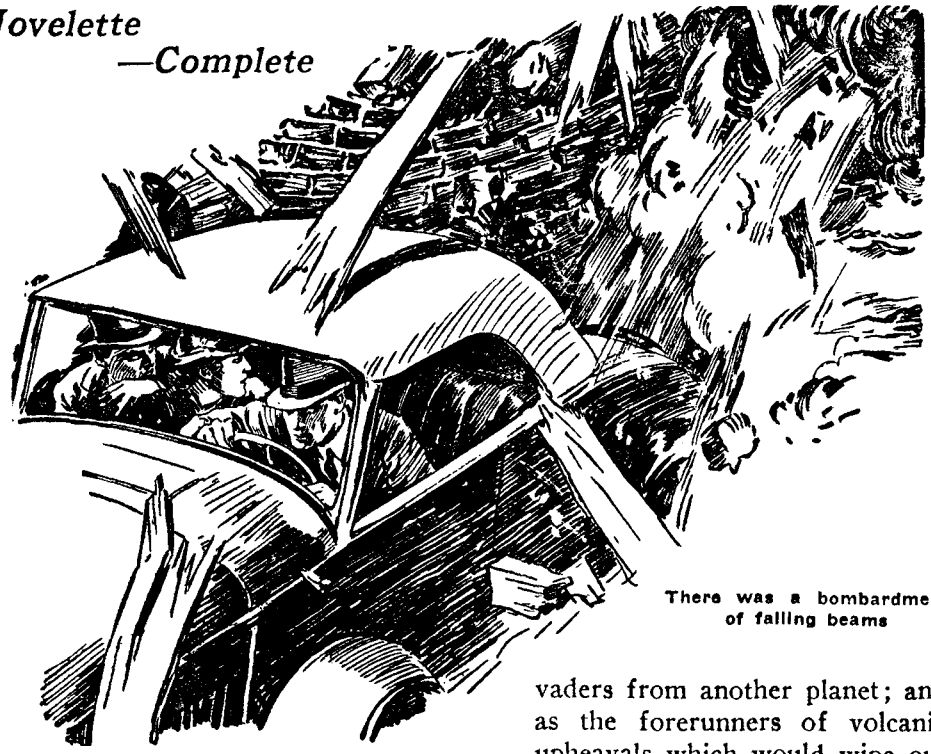
The Rollers

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "War of the Purple Gas," "The Earth-Shaker," etc.

Monstrous tornadoes were ravishing the Nation's capital—and there was one invisible force that could halt them

Novelette —Complete



There was a bombardment of falling beams

CHAPTER I.

PHONY TORNADO.

EVERYBODY remembers the Rollers. For something better than two weeks they were certainly the strangest and toward the last the most terrifying of all known "natural" phenomena. They were explained at the time as freaks of natural electricity; as weapons of unparalleled deadliness devised by a foreign power for the conquest of the United States; as methods of destruction used by invaders from another planet; and as the forerunners of volcanic upheavals which would wipe out all civilization along the Atlantic Coast. But not many people remember that these same Rollers which terrified a seaboard began in a very modest way. During the time of their occurrence, they seemed to grow and evolve as if they were malevolent living entities of earth and stone. They attained to mountainous size, to be measured only in hundreds and thousands of feet. But at their beginning the Rollers seemed deadly, yes, and malevolent too, but on a scale which by comparison is minute. Kent Berkeley saw the first one of them

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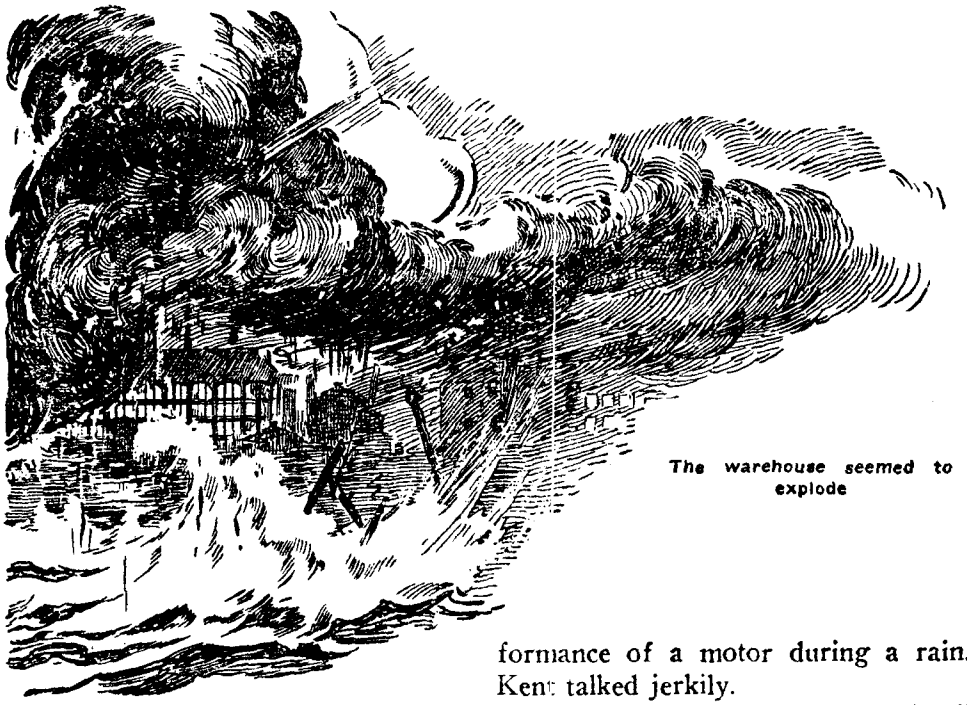

The warehouse seemed to explode

all, at the end of 8th Street, S.W., in Washington, D.C.

He was away downtown at half-past eleven at night. Janet Blair was with him. They'd been to a show and Janet was proving that she was a good sport by letting Kent drive all the way down here in one of Washington's summer thunderstorms, with the sky half split open with lightning and in a drenching downpour that made the little roadster's headlights nearly useless. Kent had something on his mind.

Rain drummed on the car's roof. The tires whined and splashed. The separated street lamps showed from a block away as mere whitish blurs of light. Nearer, they were bright spots with haloes about them. Beside the car, they threw an intolerable glare upon the wetted hood and the chromium radiator and headlights.

The motor hummed smoothly, in that extraordinarily improved performance of a motor during a rain. Kent talked jerkily.

"I know I've been dull all evening," he said, "but this thing's got my goat, Janet! It's so silly! And the man has a pretty rotten reputation. I feel like something's being put over on the company through me. It's a hunch. And I can't make sense of it!"

Janet made a sympathetic noise. Despite the storm it was cozy inside the car, and she had that serenely unreasonable contentment in Kent's company which made almost any place, under almost any circumstances, a comfortable one, if he were near.

"It's on the next block," said Kent. He frowned through the rain beyond the windshield. "A warehouse. Packed full of china and glassware. The insurer bought the stuff as a speculation, and the speculation went sour on him. He put it in the warehouse—and that's a sour speculation too. If he could collect full value for both, he'd be on his feet again. The policy's gone through. Fire and theft—that's standard. But he knows I'm suspicious, and it's dev-

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ilish hard to fake a fire so it doesn't show up as incendiary."

HE slowed the car. Lightning made the street light as day, its gutters running-full. The Potomac showed beyond, a sheet of rain-whipped placid water clearly to be seen in the lightning-flash. Kent pointed at an ungainly building to his right, and the flash died and he was pointing into blackness.

"There you are!" he said. "That's the place. He insured it for full coverage in my company, and then somebody noticed that on an insurance policy in Washington, D. C., he's insisted on tornado insurance. 'Flood, storm, cyclone, tornado and damage by the forces of nature.' That's the phrasing. In Washington! And there's something wrong!"

"I don't see why," said Janet, to show she was listening. "What is wrong about it?"

"That clause," explained Kent worriedly, "goes into policies issued in the Middle West, and sometimes even Texas and Florida, but we don't have dangerous storms in this part of the country! It was noticed after the policy had been issued and delivered. It was sent on to me, to look it up. As adjuster for this district, you know, I not only try to catch phonies after they happen, but before. Having me look up the insurer under a freak policy is routine. And this man is a wrong 'un! His reputation's bad. His financial condition is worse. A fire or a wholesale theft would be a godsend to him, because he could collect insurance on it. But why did he insist on that tornado clause, in Washington?"

There is a sort of sixth sense that comes to a man who has dealings with crooks. Kent had it. He could almost smell incendiarism in the most carefully-arranged of made-to-order fires. He'd smelled it literally, once, by catching the odor of gasoline in a telephone-directory not completely consumed in a store fire. Often he did not know himself how he knew an accident or a blaze was prearranged, but he'd come to trust his hunches. They worked out. And this hunch was a strong one.

Lightning flashed again. Thunder rolled from one side of the world to the other. Rain poured down and beat on the car, and Kent blinked at the stolid front of the warehouse and mentally bit at his nails. He couldn't see why he had this hunch, nor why it was so strong.

"If tornadoes could be made to order," he said vexedly, "I'd recommend the cancellation of the policy and return of the premium. I know there's something wrong, and I hate to have something put over on me. But what in blazes it could be—"

He felt absurd, sitting in the rain and staring at a closed building and puzzling over an oddity in an insurance policy. It was a silly thing to do. Late at night, with thunder reverberating and rain drumming over his head, and the streets in this part of town dreary and deserted and desolate in the lightning flashes.

Janet waited contentedly. Kent wanted to look at this warehouse. All right. Presently he'd take her home, and she'd give him coffee and sandwiches, and then he'd leave and she'd miss him. Therefore she was quite content as long as they were together.

An arc-light sputtered and spat, adjusting its own carbons. A low, growling roll of thunder began as a murmur and increased to an earth-shaking roar and died away again. The rain came down harder. Kent scowled, be-

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hind the wheel of the stopped small car. The hunch was strong. Crookedness. Tornado and storm-insurance in Washington, D. C. But sitting here outside the blank walls of a closed and tenantless building wouldn't help to solve the mystery.

For ten seconds, for fifteen, the sky was utterly dark. Kent irritatedly fumbled with his foot for the starter-button to get the car in motion. Then, behind him, there was a flash of lightning so startlingly vivid as almost to be blinding. The world outside the car was photographed upon his retina. And upon the rain-swept, deserted street there was a human figure visible. That figure was short and strangely ape-like. Kent stared at the blackness. Thunder began to roll and a second lightning-flash showed the figure nearer. Rain poured from it. It even showed Kent, who was looking for it, that figure's face.

HE grunted in surprise. The growl of thunder grew to a rumble and then to a roar, but he reached over Janet's lap to open the door.

"Tom!" he barked into the blackness. "Tom Haney!"

Fitful glimmers of light showed the figure to start and stop. It came close to the car.

"Hello," said a voice through the rain and thunder. "Who is it?"

"Kent. Kent Berkeley. Come in out of the rain! I'll take you where you're going!" Then to Janet, in a lower tone, "It's Tom Haney. Good scout. I didn't know he was in town. Crowd over a little bit, will you?"

Janet made room. Tom Haney, dripping, squeezed into the car and then said apologetically:

"Sorry. I didn't know there was a lady here. I'll get you wet."

"Perfectly all right," said Janet, smiling.

Kent introduced them.

"Tom's one of the best friends I've got," he explained. "Haven't seen him in a year, though. He's a dam' clever inventor, too! Anything that runs by electricity is his meat."

Haney was abnormally short. Even on the car-seat he was not nearly as tall as Janet. But he was extremely broad, and as he reached out his hand to grip Kent's, it was clear that his arms were extraordinarily long. Janet felt a touch of that curious repulsion one always feels at contact with the abnormal. Then the lightning flashed directly ahead and for an instant the inside of the car was illuminated. She saw Haney's face. She very nearly exclaimed, because it was keen-featured and intelligent, utterly at variance with his gorilla-like build, and there was more than a trace of bitterness graven upon it.

Kent said enthusiastically:

"Tom can take two dry batteries and a piece of wire and make a water-pump do typewriting! You ought to see some of the things he's invented, Janet!"

"But he's still a sucker, eh, Kent?" said Haney. His voice was agreeable enough, but there was again a trace of bitterness in evidence. "You ought to know. You lost money backing me once."

"Not your fault," insisted Kent. "What—"

"What're you doing down in this part of town?" asked Haney abruptly. "Not a very pleasant place for a girl, at this time of night."

"I'm all right," said Janet.

Kent explained. The insurance policy. The tornado clause. His hunch that there was something phony about

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it. Janet watched Haney's face in the flickering, irregular lightning-flashes. The rain drummed irregularly, now. Sometimes it dwindled to a bare shower. Again it was a heavy downpour. Haney listened with an unchanging expression.

"If there were a way to fake a tornado like you can stage a fire," said Kent at the end, "I'd have the policy canceled. As it is, I just know there's something wrong!"

Haney shrugged.

"Still," he observed, "this isn't a very pleasant part of town. What time is it?"

Kent turned on the instrument-board light. A quarter to twelve.

"I'll tell you," said Haney. "You want to take Miss Blair home. Give me your phone number or your address and I'll hunt you up tomorrow. I'll be in town for a couple of weeks."

Kent fumbled for a card.

"In town on business?"

"Perhaps." Then a flash of bitterness in Haney's tone again. "Have you heard of the Marble air torpedo?"

Kent shook his head.

"Radio-controlled plane," said Haney. "I designed it. Took the plans to the Marble firm. They listened politely, examined the plans, and pointed out what they called fatal defects in them. They had the plans photostated, I suspect. The things they pointed out were weak spots, but they work! I've changed the design since then and made it about ten times as good.—But they're demonstrating ships built after the original plans to the War Department now!"

KENT grunted angrily. "I know how you feel about that!"

"I'm trying to block it," said Haney bitterly. "If they'll only listen to me at the War Department I can show them a better design and prove the Marble gang crooks to boot!" He turned to Janet. "Kent, here, loaned me five hundred dollars once, to finish working out a special-type transformer. But it was stolen from us and he lost his money."

"I knew it was a gamble," said Kent.

"No. It was a sure thing. That's why it was stolen. The men who stole it have made plenty, too." Then Haney said again: "I'll get out. You want to be getting along. This isn't a healthy place for a lady late at night."

Janet smiled. Unthinking, she looked at her wrist-watch in the instrument-board light.

"It's not so late. Just midnight. Your clock's wrong, Kent. It always is. It's slow."

Haney fumbled with the door-catch.

"Run along, Kent! I'll see you in a day or two. It's late, and the weather's bad, and—"

Lightning split the sky again. The Potomac, in the blue-white flare, was rain-swept and teeming but placid. Another flash. Another. A falling haze of glittering drops. The thunder was momentarily delayed. And suddenly Janet gasped a little and pointed.

"Look there!"

The two men stared. All was black. Only the headlight beams lighted up the pouring rain before the car. But a new sound came. It was not thunder. It was a strange, growling, somehow liquid roar. Then the world flared bright again. And all three of them, then, saw the Roller.

It had appeared between lightning-flashes out in the river. It had not the shape of the later Rollers. This first one did not give so definite an im-

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pression of malevolence, of a hating intelligence, as the later ones diid. It was a wavering column of black, roaring upward from the river. It looked like something resting in the water. It was straight. It was dark. And it was moving. It was the water of the river and the river-bottom itself, pouring skyward at terrific speed, a solid ten-foot column at its base and for perhaps fifty feet upward. There the mass thickened, still rising. At seventy-five feet it had bulged out nearly to mushroom shape. And from the edge of the umbrella-like mass, coalescing streams of mud and water dripped down, working strangely like the tentacles of some monstrous and incredible octoped.

Lightning flashed and flamed. The Thing in the water moved here and there, wavering as if undecided. It roared. The sound it made cut through the thunders.

"Get moving!" snapped Haney. His voice cut like a knife. "That thing'll be coming this way! *Get moving!*"

For an instant, Kent hesitated. Then he flicked over the ignition-switch and stepped on the starter-button at the same instant. The little car rumbled and caught. Kent slipped it into first.

"Quick!" snapped Haney. His voice was all harsh command. "It's coming!"

The little car stirred—and the Thing in the river suddenly swooped toward the shore. It moved waveringly, erratically. Once the roaring changed to a raucous howling sound. It seemed that then the ascending column was not pure water and mud. It had a granular look in the glaring illumination of the lightning-flashes. They saw it as if in a series of snapshots, frozen in motion by the instantaneous light. And instead of water and mud, while it howled the ascending column was gravel and water.

THE car moved forward while the Thing sped toward the shore. Kent swung it badly about to flee. And suddenly there was a sensation of horrible oppression, of intolerable weight. Something seemed to thrust at his hands, to tear them away from the steering-wheel.

His head lolled. A sudden ghastly weakness tore at him. Unconsciousness dragged at his brain.

Then it was all over. The car was stalled. Janet had sagged weakly in her seat. Haney gasped:

"Speed, Kent! Get away, for God's sake!"

And as Kent jammed on the starter again the noise of the Thing behind the car ceased to be a howl and was again a roar for a moment, and then rose suddenly to an eerie whistling scream. It had struck the shore. Something fell in the street before the car. It was a mass of masonry a foot across, which splashed and shattered on the pavement. Then it seemed that the heavens were falling.

Water, earth, brickwork, wood . . . the street was deluged with débris, falling through the rain and with the rain's own velocity. The car dashed ahead. Something came down through the roof and smashed out through the bottom-boards. A mass of water, falling as a solid object, battered a mud-guard flat against a tire. The Thing from the river shrieked and screamed. There was a pelting, a bombardment of falling things. The car groaned and screeched as it was battered. The motor made a noise like some living thing stabbed to the heart. It froze, every bearing seized . . .

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Then Kent found himself staring out the back window of the car. He had flung his body over Janet to protect her from the objects falling from the sky.

His left arm was queerly numb. But, crouching over Janet to be a shield for her, he found his face so twisted that he stared backward.

Lightning flared as if the end of the world were at hand, and thunder rolled in a fitting accompaniment, but through its deep-toned roaring came the wailing shriek of the Thing from the river. It had reached the warehouse at which Kent had been looking just a few moments back. The warehouse seemed fairly to explode. Its beams, its roof, its contents—even its sidewalls seemed to fly to pieces to furnish that screaming entity with a transient substance of hurtling masses racing toward the sky. The Thing now kept to no definite form. But it played with the warehouse. It gutted it, with an eerie howl that did not diminish for minutes.

Then, suddenly, it seemed to leap crazily into the air. It left a maze of flying objects behind. A few it seized again and flung upward to an unguessable height. But the Thing itself vanished.

Above the thunder there were crashes. They diminished. Then there was only the drumming of rain and the roll of thunder. But a squealing siren raced toward them from the direction of Pennsylvania Avenue. Headlights. A police emergency truck, racing to see what damage had been done.

"Kent!" groaned Tom Haney. "Are you hurt? By God! Are you hurt?"

"O.K.," said Kent in a queer composure. "Janet?"

"I—I'm all right," gasped Janet. "You almost—smothered me!"

Kent released her, wondering vaguely how he had happened to get between her and the car-roof. He didn't remember making a shield of himself at all, but he was glad he had. Especially when he soon discovered that his left arm wouldn't move below the elbow.

"Hello!" he said in that same detached calmness. "My arm's broken. And this car's a wreck! The cops will look after us, though."

He paused.

"And the queer thing is," he said more detachedly still, "that it—that Thing, whatever it was, smashed the warehouse I was worried about. I knew that tornado-clause was phony!"

CHAPTER II.

HANEY'S THEORY.

THE first Roller, in marked contrast to its successors, attracted practically no attention. In Washington, yes. A tornado in Washington, D. C., was decidedly news, but it was preëminently local news. The damage done had been so slight as not to merit more than a column and a half even in the city's own newspapers. One warehouse gutted and shattered, three smaller buildings more or less damaged, street-paving torn up and thirty or forty roofs punctured by falling objects. Kent's car smashed beyond repair. He, himself, with a broken arm. That was the total list of damage done. It rated a column and a half in Washington, about a third of a column in Richmond, three inches of type in Philadelphia and New York, and even less farther away. It reached the Pacific Coast simply because it

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was an item about the nation's capitol, and there it read:

> WASH., D.C.—As to the climax to a summer thunderstorm last night, a miniature tornado swept over half a block in the S.W. section of the city, destroying one building and damaging three others. One person was slightly hurt.

And that was all. But to Kent it was considerably more than past and not very interesting history. It was a sore spot.

It was a defeat. Worse than that, it was the cause of bad blood between himself and the main office of the Casualty Insurance Company.

KENT BERKELEY

As an eyewitness, Kent's description of the Roller—then called a tornado—had been duly printed in the Washington papers. He kept Janet's name out of it because there was no need for her to be named.

Tom Haney had ducked out of the car as soon as the police emergency car appeared and he was sure Kent would be taken care of. So that Kent was the only person to describe what had happened.

But he knew that his hunch had been right. He wouldn't O.K. the promptly presented claim for the insurance on the warehouse. And he had been overruled by his company. He'd reported exactly what he saw and advised delay in the payment of the claim. As the adjuster on the spot, his word should have been good for something, but his account was too improbable.

He insisted that the "tornado" was arranged for.

It was a trick, as dishonest and as deliberate a fraud as a made-to-order fire. He wanted to fight the claim. He protested that since it was a fraud, if given time he'd uncover the way it had been perpetrated, and he felt that his professional pride was involved. But he was overruled.

Up in Janet's house, four or five nights later, he seethed. She'd insisted that they stay at her house that night because with his arm still in a sling he shouldn't drive. She listened while he said indignantly:

"They paid that claim yesterday! Confound it, right over my statement that it was a fake! The insurer threatened suit day before yesterday, and I fought all day long over a long-distance wire, and the result was a solemn ruling from somewhere that the company's reputation for the prompt payment of claims would be damaged if this check was held up any longer. So they paid it! That means they practically said I was crazy to c l a i m it faked!"

Janet said placatingly: "It certainly was a coincidence, Kent, but nobody can make a tornado. Nobody e v e r has."

"We saw it done!" snapped Kent. "Confound it, Janet, it's got my goat! I know that was phony! It wasn't a fair claim even by the terms of the policy. Flood, storm, cyclone, torna-

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do and damage by the forces of nature! . . . That wasn't natural!"

IT may have been partly vanity which made Kent insistent. But it was more the anger of a man who has had many dealings with crooks, and knows but cannot prove that a crook has outwitted him.

"I'm not an authority on tornadoes," said Janet, smiling, "but it looked terrible enough to be one!"

"I've been poking around. I went around next morning. The warehouse was completely wrecked, of course. It was gutted. Every bit of china and glassware in it was shattered. But, Janet, there was dirt dug up from fifteen and twenty feet down! No tornado that ever blew would dig a fifteen-foot hole! Especially a neat trench through an asphalt pavement! There never was a storm that would do that!"

"What was it, then?"

"I don't know!" said Kent furiously. "That's what makes me mad! Another thing. You remember that moment of awful heaviness we had, when we nearly went unconscious and the car stalled?"

"Yes—"

"There's a tree in a nearby back yard. It's broken down. Every limb stripped off it and lying in a heap about the base. And not one bit of débris hit that tree! It looks exactly as if it collapsed of its own weight! And I asked a doctor. I asked him what would be the result if the weight of one's body were suddenly to be doubled or tripled. He said 'You'd die.' Then he explained that the heart's accustomed to pumping against a certain load; so much resistance from the blood-vessels and so much head from the height up to the brain. Double the weight of the blood and it would be making it work against a greater head. That's why they make people with heart attacks lie down, so that an extra pound and a half to the square inch will be taken off the load the heart has to work against. Now, if we actually were heavier for a while, like that tree seemed to be, of course we'd be weak. In a couple of seconds we'd have gone unconscious. In a quarter of a minute we might have died!"

"But Kent!" protested Janet. "Weight is—it's fixed! Gravity does not change!"

"Neither do tornadoes dig holes," said Kent morosely.

The telephone rang sharply, somewhere off in the apartment.

"Wait a minute, Kent. I'll answer it."

Kent fumed up and down the room while she was away. When one's occupation is largely that of foiling crooks, it is infuriating to know that a man is a crook and then have him get away with his crookedness. Janet came back, her eyes wide.

"It was that friend of yours, Kent! Tom Haney. He said he'd been trying to reach you at your home and they suggested he call here, so he did."

"Funny," said Kent. "I'll talk to him—"

"Wait a moment! He said he wanted to see you at once, so I suggested that he come up here. Wasn't that all right?"

"Of course," said Kent. He flung himself in a chair again. "I don't know who could have told him to phone here, but I'm glad he did. I've been running myself ragged, bothering professors and such and being called crazy, trying to keep that claim from being paid. Haney's better than a dozen professors. Confound! I wish I'd been able to get hold of him these past

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few days. I might have managed to convince somebody!"

HE repeated the statement to Tom Haney when he came in. Haney was duly apologetic to Janet for having disturbed her, but he was entirely presentable as far as grooming could make him. But nothing could change the strange abnormality of his build. Janet greeted him cordially for Kent's sake, but his grotesque body made her start. All during the next half-hour she found herself forgetting it, watching his keen and intelligent face and hearing him talk. Then she'd see a long, nearly simian arm go out, or note the breadth and squatness of his figure, and suppress a shudder.

"If I'd had you to give another eye-witness account," said Kent gloomily, "maybe I'd have kept a crook from getting away with something."

"Your account was all right," said Haney. "I read it in the newspapers. It was accurate."

Janet smiled at him.

"Kent's bitter," she explained. "He hates to see a crook succeed in stealing something. And he's been forced to stand by and watch just that, he thinks."

"So have I," said Haney. He added harshly: "I've spent the last five days trying to get a hearing at the War Department. It's full of minor clerks and self-important officers just sitting around waiting to turn down something. When I mention a radio-controlled torpedo-plane they look wise. They're about to try one, fully developed. They don't want to look at plans. Then when I explain that I designed the other and it was stolen from me—why—then they decide I'm a crank and edge me out the door." Bitterness was pronounced in his tone when he finished: "I know how you feel, watching a crook getting away with his game! I've been doing the same thing! And at that, your story in the newspapers was enough to tell anybody how it had been done."

Kent stared.

"How it was done? Tom! Have you got a line on it? I knew there was something crooked! How did it happen?"

Haney shrugged. He looked at Janet. "Please!" she said. "I want to know too!"

"A bit technical," he said uncomfortably. "But I went home and thought it over. I got to thinking about that moment of extreme weight we felt. I felt the car sag on its springs, then. That extra weight was real."

"There's a tree—" said Kent feverishly, and explained.

"Yes." Haney nodded. "That checks up. We were up against something queer, any way you look at it. Either something outside us gave us a subjective sensation of weight — and nothing is known that will do it — or something tampered with gravity. Nothing is known that will do that, either, but of the two possibilities it's the more probable. Now, Einstein's space-warping theory of gravitation is interesting enough, but so far it's unproved. It's been suggested more than once that gravitation is a form of radiant energy. If that idea is right, and Einstein is wrong, then somebody's found a way of affecting that radiation. Yes?"

"I see," said Janet, absorbed. "I think—I think I see what you're getting at. All that stuff flying upward—"

"Just so!" Haney nodded approvingly at her. "Now, there's no substance known that will reflect or refract or absorb gravity. There are the-

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oretic reasons why there couldn't be any. Which means that a force applied to gravitational waves would be the only possibility. A field of force, say. And the first thing that popped into my head was the fact that a magnetic field of force affects one sort of radiation, anyhow—light. It rotates the plane of polarization of polarized light. You see?"

Again it was Janet who said doubtfully:

"Yes. . . . Like sugar?"

"Fine!" said Haney warmly. "Exactly! Then I got to wondering if there couldn't be a field of force that would polarize the waves I suppose constitute gravity. I even worked out a sort of theory for such a field. And I can—well—not demonstrate, but I can illustrate what I think happened."

HE fumbled in his pocket. He brought out two tiny crystals, ground flat. He showed them to Kent and Janet.

"Tourmaline," he explained, and held one above a table-lamp. "I think the thing that made the tornado worked something like this. This crystal polarizes visible light. If you look, you'll see that though it's transparent it casts a sort of semi-shadow on the ceiling. Half the light that hits it passed straight through. But there, a couple of feet away, there's a bright spot. The other half of the light bends off to one side."

Kent watched, but almost vaguely. Janet grew absorbed. Between the deep shadow of Haney's fingers there was a smoky sort of shadow which was that of the crystal. Off to one side there was a bright spot.

"Now I put the other crystal alongside," said Haney. "It does the same thing. A half-shadow from the crystal and another bright place off to the side. Now I'll hold one above the other."

He did. And the two smoky shadows, added together, made a deep and complete shadow. The two bright spots coalesced, so that there was a spot of illumination which was brilliant indeed, just twice as bright as the rest of the ceiling.

"That's what I think happened. The light represents gravity. The crystals represent two of the fields of force for which I worked out a sort of theory. The complete shadow would be a place of no gravity at all, because the gravity has been bent aside to make that 'bright' spot where things would weigh twice as much as usual. In the shadow, where things were without weight, they'd shoot upward from the centrifugal force of the earth's rotation. In this latitude, that would mean a starting speed of decidedly better than four hundred and fifty miles an hour! But as the stuff went up, the shadow wouldn't shield it so strongly. Air-resistance would be terrific. And it would get out of the gravity-shadow anyhow. But it would make all the effects we saw, Kent, including the extra weight we felt and which broke down that tree."

He glanced at Kent, but his eyes dwelt on Janet. She nodded and smiled at him. And suddenly Kent said excitedly:

"I get it! Surely! Even the bulge at the top! Look here, Tom! You've got to explain this to some higher-ups! Otherwise we'll be having these phony tornadoes all over the place—"

"Explain? Why?" asked Haney sardonically. "I'm in Washington trying to get some higher-ups to listen to me! And I'm getting nowhere. Why should I get another man in trouble?

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Wait till we see what he does with his gravity-fields! If he just intends to rob insurance companies, I'll do what I can to stop him. But maybe he just did this to get a stake. If that's all, I shan't interfere with him. Wait and see what he does!"

He stood up abruptly, and his near-deformity became suddenly marked. He said curtly:

"I wanted to find you tonight for a special reason, Kent. You put some money into a trick of mine once, and lost it. You were a good sport and didn't beef about it. I've made some money another way. I want to pay you back."

Kent shook his head.

"No! I gambled, and I lost. It wasn't a loan, and you're not going to give it back. I'm not a welcher, Tom."

Haney smiled at him strangely. "No, you're not. You're a good sport. Always. But I wanted to offer it, anyhow.—I'll be going."

"And you won't explain your theory for me?" asked Kent curiously.

"No-o. Not yet. I'd like to have it worked out better, anyhow. Maybe later, Kent. If this man with his force-fields tries to rob your company again I certainly will."

SMILING strangely, he made an awkward bow, the more awkward because of his abnormal build. But Janet stood up and smiled warmly at him.

She went to the door with him, while Kent scowled gloomily at the floor. It was some time before she came back.

"That's the devil!" said Kent. "He won't talk! He's one of the best fellows in the world, but if he says he won't, he won't!"

Janet said rather quietly: "I told him we were both going to explain his theory to my uncle tomorrow morning, Kent."

"What? Who?"

"Uncle Jerry," said Janet. "He's a director in the Casualty Company. If we both go, he'll listen. And it may do some good for you."

"If I know the insurance business," said Kent gloomily, "there'll be a flock of tornado-insurance clauses asked for in town here. And some of them will be phonies too. If a man can hire a tornado to smash his place, the company will take a licking. And there'll be some lives lost too, sooner or later. I'd do almost anything to get that crook!"

"I think—" said Janet, and stopped. She looked at Kent uneasily. "What do you really think, Kent?"

"Confound! I forgot to ask Tom for his address!" said Kent.

He did not notice that Janet wore a curious expression for a little while, as if there were some idea in her head that she did not quite like to put into words.

During all the rest of the evening she seemed to be trying to keep Kent's mind off the affair which was actually the first of the Rollers. And, as Kent felt about her very much the same way as she felt about him, on the whole she succeeded fairly well.

But it was back again on Kent's mind next morning. Inevitably. This was the first time he felt he'd really been defeated by a crook. Janet met him and they went downtown together.

"I called Uncle Jerry and told him you had something important to say to him," she reported. "He's expecting us."

"He'll probably say I'm crazy, too," said Kent bitterly. "I wish I'd argued

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with Tom Haney. I might have persuaded him to come along."

"I tried, too," said Janet. "I told him we were coming here and what time. Maybe he'll reconsider and join us."

But Kent did not cheer up. He knew Tom Haney. Besides, he'd passed a nearly sleepless night, marshalling and re-marshalling his facts in accordance with Haney's theory. There would be dozens or hundreds of tornado-clause policies applied for. Some of them

TOM HANEY

were already in. To approve them would mean a fortune for some crook or other. To persuade the company to deny them would mean that even honest men, observing inexplicable storms destroying property, would be refused insurance-protection against that type of damage and the Casualty would lose out in business in this section.

They reached the tall office-building. They went aloft to the office of Janet's uncle, to whom a directorship in the Casualty Insurance Company was something of an honor and rather more of a bore. He received them, beaming at Janet. From his office one looked across many lesser roofs toward the Treasury and the Washington Monument beyond, with a thin silver thread of the Potomac in view toward the misty Virginia shore.

Kent plunged into his explanation, painstakingly and with a certain discouragement in his manner. Janet's uncle was typically the prosperous business man, who would see nothing that could not be put down in figures, and preferably on a cost-sheet. Kent hadn't much hope.

But the older man listened. Janet put in a word now and again. The story emerged, coherent and hanging perfectly together—and flatly contradicting certain elementary laws of physics.

It even denied the verity of an Einsteinian postulate, which was a finishing touch of unconvincingness.

"It's very interesting," said Janet's uncle patiently, when Kent had finished. "But I am not capable of passing on the scientific aspect, and those who do know about such things seem to think—"

HE did not finish. He never finished. He gasped. Because it seemed that the floor suddenly dropped away beneath all three of them. There was no movement of any object in the room. But the floor, the walls, the building itself, fell with a dizzying speed! It was like dropping in a free-falling elevator which did not check, which fell faster and faster and ever faster until a ghastly terror of the inevitable smash-up made one's tongue cleave to the roof of one's mouth.

Somebody shrieked, nearby. Stark, helpless terror filled the whole building. It went hurtling headlong—with the sun still shining brightly upon it—and its halls filled with a shrill and high-

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pitched screaming as of lost souls dropping down to hell.

CHAPTER III.

NO GRAVITY AND DOUBLE GRAVITY.

FOR a time that seemed minutes the dizzy fall continued. No jar, no jolt, no sound of whistling wind. The sun continued to shine in the window. Other buildings remained in their same relative positions. The sky, the clouds—everything seemed to be falling too. It looked as if a whole vast section of the earth's crust had suddenly collapsed into an unguessed at cavern in the planet's interior. Kent, standing rigid as the whole city seemed to drop faster and faster into some unimaginable abyss, found his eyes turn to the east. He watched for the waters of the ocean to come pouring in, miles high . . .

Then the fall checked. Suddenly. Exactly as if, in some titanic elevator, the operator had applied the brakes. The floor pressed against Kent's feet again. For seconds his weight seemed normal. Then he was heavier than normal. The drop was being checked more swiftly still. He was heavy . . . For long seconds that extra weight continued. Longer than—so his instincts told him — would have been needed to end the fall. And suddenly he realized that the city was rising again. It was shooting up with the same dizzy velocity and the same incredible smoothness. It was shooting aloft, faster and ever faster. In an elevator such a rise would have brought on panic. After five seconds of it a man would have known terror from the seeming inevitability of a crash through the very top of the elevator-shaft. That same panic came now.

Janet was deathly pale. With a queer little gesture of resignation she moved close to Kent. She smiled very faintly, her eyes frightened, and pressed against him in an instinct to be close to him at the moment of apparently unavoidable death. Kent put his arm about her and held her fast. It was strangely quiet, in this office. Janet's uncle stood frozen, his eyes wide and fixed, holding to his self-control with a desperate effort. A pendulum clock on one wall had stopped. And from all about the building came what was now a monotonous shrill of despair.

Up and up, for an incredible length of time and to an unthinkable height. Then a sickening pause, and that terrible, headlong plunge down into the abyss again . . .

"It's—taking a long time—to happen," said Janet faintly.

SHE spoke of death, of course. But Kent stirred, as if her words had awakened him. He stared about. Out the window. Across many roofs and toward the Washington Monument. There was movement, but no panic. Cars rolled placidly. Kent saw a small group of people walking. They showed no signs of terror. A mail-plane soared lazily to a landing on the airport across the river.—This while the city went hurtling down and down with ever-mounting velocity . . .

"Hold everything!" said Kent suddenly. His voice was strained, because all his senses told him he was falling to inevitable destruction. But as he spoke, confidence came into it. "We're not falling! Look at the city! Nobody else is frightened! They don't feel what we feel! Janet! We think we're falling because we feel lighter. We think we're rising because we feel heavier. But it's the same trick we've

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just been talking about! That man Tom Haney guessed at is trying out his apparatus! Maybe he's focussing it for something he intends to do later! He hasn't turned it on to full strength or we'd go flying through the air or else faint as we nearly did in the car! Instead of no-gravity and double-gravity, to-day he's working with half-gravity and one-and-a-half gravities! He's using one polarizing field instead of two!"

And then, quite suddenly, without any jerk at all, their normal weight came back to them and stayed. For a little while they seemed still to be falling. Then there were moments of helpless indecision when they seemed to be flying upward. Everyone in the building felt the same. There were new cases of delayed hysteria in that office-building for two hours yet to come, when individuals who had clung desperately to sanity when death seemed imminent, went abruptly to pieces at varying intervals after it was all over. The hospitals in Washington had a busy day of it, soothing fear-crazed people. And there were plenty of patients because the extraordinary phenomenon was not confined to the one building. There was a second and part of a third in which the same sensations had been felt by every occupant. More than a block of unaffected space separated the two areas, however, and it developed that to those in the other buildings the oscillations had seemed to start with a swift and ghastly rise, instead of a fall. Apparently when people in one area felt they were falling, those in the other felt they were rising, and vice versa.

Neither Kent nor Janet went to pieces. They were white and shaken, to be sure. Janet's uncle was almost pitiful to look at. But they felt—all three of them, now, that they knew just what had happened. And Kent was nearly glad it had occurred, when the net result was the convincing of a director in the Casualty Insurance Company of the correctness of his reports. That, Kent felt, ought to produce some action.

He was wrong. Janet's uncle was convinced. He began an impassioned campaign to spread his conviction. And he got exactly nowhere.

HE was not a scientist and his explanation contradicted essential laws of physics. It even necessitated the assumption that Einstein was wrong, which prevented any man of learning from giving the rest of the theory any consideration whatever. Science has its dogmas as well as theology, and very many scientists are fundamentalists. Because he was a rich man, Janet's uncle was not laughed at. But even in his own company, in which he was a considerable stockholder, he succeeded only in raising enough dust to make the policy department a trifle more cautious in issuing policies with the tornado-clause attached. Applications for them were pouring in. Some people undoubtedly considered the addition of such a clause merely sound conservative far-sightedness since one tornado had struck Washington. Some people, Kent was furiously sure, were hopeful of hiring the tornado-maker to enable them to clean up, too. And Kent was trying desperately to find Tom Haney, to get an actually scientific presentation of his argument to back up the fight that two of them, now, were making. But Haney seemed to have vanished. Kent could find no trace of him anywhere.

Obviously, when a good many hundred people experienced the same

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thing at the same time, and a fair proportion of them had hysterics in consequence, this particular manifestation of the unusual could not be ignored. Haney's theory, as put forward by Kent and Janet's uncle, could be and was dismissed without consideration. But some theory had to be devised, and an eminent scientist propounded an hypothesis of earth-currents — ordinarily known as "strays"—which at given spots produced electrostatic fields which in turn produced physiological symptoms interpreted as sensations of falling or of being thrown upward. Of course no such effect of electrostatic fields had ever been observed, and no unusual amount of earth-currents was recorded on the instruments of the geophysical laboratory. But this explanation had the great virtue of not contradicting Einstein.

That was that. For two days nothing happened which seemed to bear upon the tornado—which was the first Roller—or the extremely uncomfortable few minutes Kent and Janet had passed in her uncle's office. Kent still couldn't locate Haney. And he began to watch the newspapers with a meticulous attention, looking to see if conveniently timed small tornadoes or similar occurrences were happening anywhere else. It was that search which led him to suspect the Rollers of identity with his private tornado.

The second Roller was sighted on a Thursday nine days after the first one in the guise of a tornado had broken Kent's arm and wrecked a heavily insured warehouse. That was also four days after the payment of the insurance on the wrecked warehouse three days after Haney had explained what he thought the supposed tornado might be, and two after seeming gigantic oscillations by an office building. The second Roller was seen by a colored farmhand near Berea Store in Fauquier County, Virginia, in the mountains some fourteen miles northwest of Warrenton.

According to his account, he was plowing a rocky hillside and stopped to rest his horse. Then, suddenly, something growled a long way away. He thought it was thunder, though the sky was clear, but it did not roll and rumble like thunder does. This was a steady, sustained roaring noise. Then it became a howl and—so the negro declared—something nearly as big as a mountain came hopping over a mountain-top. It hopped on one leg which was long and spindling, and it had a round, frog-like body at the top of its single leg, and the darky saw it move in a succession of monster leaps down the eastward flank of a mountain and then stand still for a while on the valley floor. It was "looking around" according to the panic-stricken black man, and on the same authority it seemed to find nothing of interest in the view and after a while sat down and went to sleep.

THE negro had been paralyzed by terror during all its movement after its first appearance. After it went to sleep he crept away, leaving his horse. He was pale gray in color when he told his tale, and he was so pitiably frightened that white men investigated. They found that he was telling at least a part of the truth. There was a jagged, zig-zag trail down the mountain-flank. In that trail, which in spots was fifteen feet deep, earth and stone and trees and loose rocks were swept cleanly away. And where the darky described the Thing as having sat down and gone to sleep, the white men found a new hillock of

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extraordinary composition. It was at least thirty feet high and a hundred feet across. It was made up of loose earth and stones and stray detritus, and the splintered branches and trunks of trees were intricately mingled with blocks of stone which weighed tons and could not possibly have been lifted by any wind. The idea of a tornado was ruled out by those rocks. Moreover, the sky was completely clear.

That made the newspapers as freak news. Of the thousands who read it, only Kent saw in it a possibility of more than freakishness.

The next Roller was sighted the following day. A Sunday school picnic was under way, moving in four rural school busses from Front Royal to Luray for no discoverable reason. At eleven A.M. it was some three miles south of Rileysville, with the tall rampart of the Blue Ridge looming up above the highway to eastward, and the green mass of the Alleghenies on the farther side of the Valley of Virginia. Suddenly, the leading one of the four busses braked and stopped. Its driver got out and listened to his engine, thereby reassuring the other three drivers, each one of whom had suspected his own motor of making that queer roaring noise. But with all the busses stopped, the noise still kept up. And then, out of a minor valley between thousand-foot hills, there strode the second Roller.

There were preachers and deacons among these witnesses, and they swear that it was not less than two hundred feet high. It had two legs, and it walked upon them drunkenly. Those legs were hazy masses of flying, whirling stone and earth. Its body was a chaos, a screaming whirlwind of stone and red clay and green stuff. It had no head, but it stood still upon its spindly legs and seemed to regard the Sunday school picnic malevolently. The fact that filled every person who saw it with horror was that the Thing looked so horribly alive. It looked sentient, brutishly conscious. It looked like some unthinkable robot come unexpectedly to life and yet dazed by the new world about it, yet already hating men.

It stood reeling upon its spindly legs, by the very conditions of its existence emitting a screaming, roaring, raucous tumult. It dripped stones and clods of earth as if in some unwholesome sweat. It took one undecided step toward the school busses. Then it came about and went horribly, drunkenly away and out of sight again. But its body was a whirling chaos, and it seemed that it watched them as it went waddling and wabbling away. When it vanished, the Sunday school picnic was ruined. Nobody, not even a child, could be in a festive mood after such an apparition.

THIS story, too, made the newspapers. It was again verified. The tracks of the monster were great gashes in the earth. Of the monster itself there remained—well—only an inexplicable heap of stones and wind-torn earth and splintered tree-trunks.

Another monster appeared late that afternoon some eight or ten miles almost due south, where a highway winds across the Blue Ridge mountains and at a high pass affords a view no tourist fails to stop and admire and usually to photograph. There were four carloads of people at the top of the pass at the moment, all parked beside the skyline inn which is actually a filling-station and souvenir mart. One car was from Delaware, one from New York, and two from Pennsylvania.

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The occupants of those cars saw the fourth Roller. It came up the mountains from the Shenandoah Valley. It was a disk, a plate, a circular sheet of pure chaos. It rolled upon itself and ran restlessly. Though featureless it had an uncanny semblance of life. Though unorganized it had a horrible appearance of purpose. Some of those tourists photographed this Roller. The snapshots are harsh and inartistic, but they do show the monster as it appeared among the mountains. In those pictures it looks like a disk of smoke instead of whirling clay and stone. It was four hundred feet or more in diameter, and it ran upon one rim. Behind it stretched a thread of what looks like silk in the snapshots. Actually, it was a snaky, wavering trail of denuded soil, cut away clean until only raw red clay or bare stone was left.

Such a trail could not be missed. This Roller, too, was tracked to its ending. And there the trackers found simply another tumbled heap of broken stones and débris of every possible sort.

There were eight others that were seen, and more than a dozen unreported by any human being, yet whose trails were found upon the mountains of Virginia within the next few days. Every one was within eighty miles of Washington. Every one was somehow different from its predecessor. There is a clearly defined course of evolution in the successive Rollers seen, so that by the gaps in the descriptions we can reconstruct the appearance of those no human eye beheld.

The Rollers began—if you count the first one of all—as a spout of mud and water which expanded into an octopod-like body some seventy feet in the air. Those in the Virginia mountains, both reported by eyewitnesses and reconstructed in part from their trails, seem to have begun with one which was a single spout of earth, of clay, which looked like a leg supporting the maelstrom of flying missiles which was in some sense its body. Then there were Rollers with two legs. With three, and four. One horrible trail, leading to a monstrous heap of débris at its end, proves that Roller to have had no less than twelve legs contributing to its upholding and its size. It was at least half a mile wide. The flying disk seen by tourists in the Blue Ridge was apparently a sport, a freak. But with the last two Rollers seen, their evolution seemed to have stopped. One was small; a hundred feet high and no more. The other was a fit precursor to the Rollers which terrorized a seaboard. These two were identical save for differences in size. Haney saw the last and described it to Janet.

"HE came to see me last night," Janet nervously told Kent, the night following. "He said he hoped to find you at my house. But he stayed and talked when you weren't here."

"I was poking around, trying to find him," said Kent. "Did he tell you where I can locate him?"

"He's been out of town," explained Janet, still uneasily. "He—he got an idea, he said, that those queer monsters of earth and stone that people have been reporting in the Blue Ridge mountains might be somehow connected with that tornado we—saw."

Kent's eyes glittered. "What'd he say?"

"He was trying to interest me, to amuse me," said Janet, and looked at Kent for some sign of jealousy. "He saw that big Roller that the airplane photographed. You remember? A

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passenger plane sighted it and an air-photographer on board took pictures before it went on to Richmond?"

Kent nodded.

"What did Tom say?" he asked eagerly.

"He just—told me what that last one was like. It was three hundred feet high, he said, and it began in a whirling mist that spread sidewise, spinning over and over, until there was a smoky sort of column lying on the ground maybe fifteen hundred feet long. It was whirling on itself in the air. He said it looked something like a swarm of insects, but instead of bugs there were stones and boulders and clods of earth and trees whirling around and around. And then it moved. There was a deep hole in the earth where it had started, he told me, and that hole simply got larger when the Roller moved away from its starting-place. And the substance of the Roller grew thicker. As it moved, the topsoil, the earth with everything that was on it and in it, simply swept right up into motion with that monstrous thing and began to spin around with the rest of the stuff. Haney said it was like watching a ghost turn into a living thing. He watched that Roller move three miles or more, and he says that it looked like it was alive. It gave a horrible impression of something that was alive and hateful and malignant. Like something that wanted to devour and destroy every living thing!"

"What happened?"

"It—traveled for three miles. Over mountains and valleys, through a wood, across a highway. It left only raw earth and bare rock behind it. It was nearly solid when it stopped."

"And then—"

"It just collapsed. Suddenly. And there's a monstrous, snaky, raw-looking heap of everything it picked up lying across a valley. A muddy yellow lake is backing up behind it."

Kent meditated morosely.

"What a hell of a thing!" Then he said: "But, Janet, didn't you find out how we can reach Tom when we want him? I need to talk to him!"

"No . . ." Janet hesitated. "Kent, I—I'm worried. I think he—likes me. More than I want him to. He tried so hard to be interesting . . . I'm sorry for him, because he's so nice and yet so—repulsive. And there's another thing. I have a sort of feeling . . ."

But Kent was staring blankly at her. The idea of Haney falling in love with Janet was somehow incredible, yet it stirred up a latent jealousy. Janet did not get a chance to explain the queer and not very plausible idea she had. She was busy assuring Kent that she wasn't in love with Haney. Not the least bit. But the idea persisted.

CHAPTER IV.

MOST TERRIBLE OF ALL.

KENT saw Haney three nights later. Janet's mother phoned, saying that Janet suggested that he come over. And Kent felt a momentary flare of jealousy, and then a mollified satisfaction. He knew what the phone-call meant, of course. Janet would have called herself if Haney hadn't been there, when to phone Kent and ask him up would have been discourteous. But having her mother call at least was one way of assuring him without words that he'd no reason to be jealous. He arrived at Janet's house in a mood almost of magnanimity, when he could feel sorry for Haney for his quite hopeless attempt to win

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Janet. And in that mood he did not need a warning glance from Janet to tell him not to mention the cause of his coming.

Haney shook hands cordially enough.

"I thought you'd be over here, Kent," he observed. "And Janet said you might turn up."

"I've been running myself ragged trying to find you," said Kent. "Tom, if those Rollers out in the mountains are the work of the same man who smashed that warehouse, it's getting dangerous! It's all right to sympathize with a man who might just need a stake, but that chap's developing a weapon! And what's he going to use it for?"

Haney nodded in agreement.

"I've been thinking something like that myself," he admitted. "I went down to look at the Rollers. I saw one. Did Janet tell you?"

"She did. And honestly, Tom, a thing like that's too dangerous to be going around loose! Not to mention the fact that the War Department ought to know how to counter such a thing. With one of those Rollers a man—a lunatic, say—could smash up a city!"

Haney nodded again.

"I've no reason to love the War Department," he said bitterly. "They're staging a full-scale test of my torpedo-plane to-morrow out at Aberdeen. I want to get you and Janet to go out there with me—to keep me from making a fool of myself! But anyhow, I agree that the Rollers are too dangerous a thing for an individual to have. I've been working to try to get a line on how they're made. So far I've got the mathematics of it pretty well worked out. I believe I could duplicate, on a small scale, the outfit he used to make that tornado we all have reason to remember."

Janet interposed.

"But after all, you're both just assuming that the Rollers in the mountains are made the same way as that tornado. And everybody who's seen the Rollers thinks they're alive; monsters; something horrible and malignant."

"Stone doesn't live," said Haney. "I could draw you a diagram of fields-of-force that would make any one of those monsters! And I'm willing to bet that within a mile or two of every one of them there was a motor car with the apparatus in it that made them! The man who made them was experimenting. He was studying them, playing with his outfit and finding out what he could do. And he found out he can do plenty!"

"But," persisted Janet, "they were so big! Hundreds of feet high! That one you saw must have weighed hundreds of thousands of tons! It would take a powerhouse to make the power necessary to lift all that mass of stone and earth!"

Haney grinned at her.

"Wrong again, Janet! You're thinking of lifting a stone, instead of letting go of it. You're thinking of lifting a mass against gravity, instead of simply turning off gravity. It would take, for instance, a great deal of power to pull a piece of iron away from a big electro-magnet that was holding it. But it wouldn't take much power to turn off the switch that fed the juice!"

"I—see," said Janet dubiously.

"The main thing, though," insisted Kent, "is what you're going to do, Tom! I've done all I can. Janet's uncle has done all he can do. But unless we're to see somebody—maybe a lunatic—have the whole country at his

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mercy, you've got to come forward and show somebody in authority just what's being done and if possible how to stop it! You're the only man who can! And besides, once you've done that you can get a hearing anywhere on any subject you want to bring up! For your sake alone you ought to do it!"

HANEY'S ever-present bitterness intensified.

"Of course! I'm to steal another man's work, just as other men have stolen mine. And as a reward, maybe I'll be protected against other thieves by the fact that I'm a thief myself!"

He got up to go, and he was grotesque to look at. His fine, keen face was anomalous in his misshapen body.

"But I'll do it," he said cynically. "I'll do it! If this other man's enough of a scoundrel I'll become a hero because I pick his brains as I might pick his pocket! But I'll carry on and duplicate his apparatus as well as I can.—Will you go with me to Aberdeen tomorrow? They're trying out my plane-torpedo on the proving-grounds. We can't get in, of course, because only the thieves who stole it are allowed inside. But we'll be able to see something from beyond the proving-ground fences."

"Of course we'll go," said Janet. "Your car or Kent's?"

"Better make it Kent's," said Haney. "I'll be too angry to drive sanely. I'd rather trust to Kent, even with one arm."

He went away. Janet saw him to the door. She came back with an expression of uncertainty on her face.

"Kent, don't you think—"

"I think he's in love with you," said Kent. "And he's a decent chap. If I thought he had the ghost of a show I'd be half crazy. But—he hasn't, has he?"

Janet smiled at him.

"Of course not, silly! But still . . ."

She did not say what was in her mind, though. Not that night, nor the next morning when Kent came for her, nor on the way to where they were to pick up Haney. He'd arranged to meet them at the corner of Capitol Square, as more convenient than his home. And he'd evaded saying where he was stopping.

Kent's new car was roomier than the smashed one. The three of them fitted comfortably in the front seat. Kent headed out of Washington and the car sped for Baltimore. Janet was very quiet. Haney was at once fidgety and embittered. He tried not to talk of the one thing that was on his mind, but he was hardly able to think of anything else. Now and again he made some jerky comment. About the car. The road. The weather. Once, somehow, the subject of roadmaps came up, and Haney talked lucidly and enthusiastically about the ordnance survey maps put out by the government.

"Why, you can locate any object within a hundred feet!" he said. "With a map like that, a man could take one of my torpedo-planes—"

THEN he stopped short. He turned on the car-radio instead of continuing. Most of the way to Baltimore he fiddled with it, testing it for range and selectivity with half-hearted approval. The traffic in Baltimore was, as always, extremely heavy. It took them half an hour to get through the town. Then they went on a bit faster. Haney jerkily explained that the test would begin at half-past ten. To cover his nervousness he

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played with the radio again. Snatches of everything came through. Music. A woman talking with forced enthusiasm of some special flour supposed to be especially rich in calcium, phosphorus, and other publicised chemicals. Somebody talking impassionedly about a political cure-all. More music. A child singing slightly off-key. Then a booming voice: "*Special storm warning! A severe disturbance has been reported in Chesapeake Bay. It is local, but of high intensity and moving rapidly in a northwest direction. Vessels receiving this bulletin are asked to notify small boats . . .*" The voice went on to give exact locations. Janet looked at Haney queerly.

That was ten miles out of Baltimore. By the time they reached Bel Aire the warning was coming more urgently. Another station chimed in with a repetition. A little beyond Bel Aire the storm was declared to be a local hurricane displaying peculiar features. It was blowing beneath an absolutely cloudless sky and constituted a grave danger to any vessel approaching it. Haney snapped off the radio. They drew near Aberdeen, where at the proving grounds new pieces of ordnance are tested. And suddenly they ran into heavy traffic.

It all moved in one direction and at high speed, away from the little town of Aberdeen itself. Cars of every model and make and year and every condition of decrepitude. Every one packed with human beings. Trucks loaded down with children. Even teams of horses trying valorously to keep up with the motorized flight. It looked like the exodus of a whole population.

That flight passed them swiftly. One or two voices shouted at them, but that was all. The traffic dwindled to a desperately pedaled bicycle or two. It ceased. Then they drove into Aberdeen, and it was deserted. But a throaty voice bellowed from a loudspeaker in an empty drugstore.

"*Warning to everyone in northern Maryland! Warning! The local hurricane in the Chesapeake has taken a new turn. It has turned on its side and now is a monstrous rolling mass of mud and water, which seems to be moving toward land. Unless this object changes its course, the town of Aberdeen will be overwhelmed. All persons in this district are advised to abandon their homes and get out of the path . . . unavoidable . . . struction . . .*

The voice died away behind them. Haney said in a strained voice:

"Go on, Kent. I've seen one of those Rollers. They don't move too fast for us to dodge, and we could outrun it on a straightaway course. Carry on! That's the proving-ground fence before us."

The barbed-wire fence was dead ahead. Through it, a silver-winged plane was visible on the ground. But suddenly neither the three in the car nor the men on the ground beside the plane were paying any attention at all to it. Something was coming from the southeast, just rolling into view. And it was so monstrous, so vast, so incredible, that it was impossible to do anything but gape at it.

AT the moment it was a colossal moving bulk which glittered liquidly in the sunlight. It was huge. It was beyond parallel or experience. It was not less than five hundred feet high—and a twenty-story office-building does not reach half that altitude. It came rolling on with a terrible deliberation. As it drew near, the substance of which it was made

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could be seen. It was mud and water and earth and fields and trees and stone and sand. It was in the shape of a cylinder, revolving upon itself and resting upon the earth, and the earth beneath it was absorbed into its mass and churned into the hellish, semi-liquid broth which was the Roller itself. An airplane hangar disappeared under its advancing, bellied bottom. One revolution, and fragments of the hangar showed upon the descending mass. It was growing as a snowball grows, by gathering up all it rolled over, and it was half a mile wide and five hundred feet in diameter and it seemed a living, sentient, insatiably voracious animal. It gave the impression of looking at one. It was alive, and it hated, and it would destroy . . .

Some of the little figures by the silver-winged plane fled in a puny panic as the Roller bore heavily upon them, dripping great clots of mud and clay and stone, like sweat. The sound of the Thing was overwhelming; indescribable. The roar of the little plane's motor as it took off was utterly inaudible.

But it rose and circled once, a midge before a giant. And then it darted and stabbed gracefully at the very forefront of the advancing Roller. As it struck, flame flashed from it. The small and graceful flying thing blew itself to atoms in the one blow it was able to strike.

The sound of that explosion cut through even the awful tumult of the Roller. The concussion racked one's ear-drums. And, vast as the Roller was, it staggered. Then, quite abruptly, a shiver went through all its colossal form and suddenly it collapsed.

"Let's get away from here!" snapped Haney. "That's mud and it'll splash . . ."

Kent shot the car away as a huge billow of half-liquid mud roared across the proving-ground. The Roller had suddenly lost all its form and all its coherency. It was a vast bulk of an unholy mixture which dropped all at once. The ground quivered from the impact of hundreds of thousands of tons. A long tongue of mud, as it happened, ran all the way into the town of Aberdeen itself, and had to be cut away from a national highway before traffic could go through. But at that it seemed that a major catastrophe had been averted by the presence of a torpedo-plane ready for trial, which had exploded itself against the monster.

Janet said something of the kind as they headed homeward. And Haney said bitterly:

"Nothing of the sort! The Roller was due to fall apart then, anyhow! It's just a coincidence that it dropped when the torpedo-plane went off!"

When they passed through Baltimore there were extras already on the streets. "ROLLER BLOWN UP!" shouted the headlines. Lesser headlines said that an "*Army Torpedo-plane Shatters Monster Freak.*" Kent stopped the car and bought a copy of the extra. Haney read it as they went on back toward Washington. He ground his teeth.

"The damned thieves!" he cried in the quintessence of bitterness. "They steal my design, and now they're heroes because they're thieves, and there's no question in the world but that their contract with the War Department goes through! All because they're thieves and had a lucky break!"

KENT was groping in his head for an association of ideas which eluded him. There was something tantalizingly just out of his

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mental reach, which would bear upon this whole problem if only he could think of it. The sensation was as annoying as to have a word on the tip of your tongue and then not be able to say it. Kent had an idea on the very edge of his mind, and couldn't make it clear enough to examine it. He only knew it was there.

He stopped the car at Janet's house. She got out, strangely quiet.

"I know you want to go on to the office, Kent," she said soberly, "but I—want to talk to somebody..."

"Suppose I stay?" said Haney, almost eagerly. "There's something I want to ask you about, Janet."

"Please do!" Janet smiled gravely at him. "I was hoping you would. 'By, Kent."

Kent drove on to his office. His brain tantalized him. Also, he had again a twinge of jealousy. He was still pacing up and down his office, unable to work, when his phone rang an hour later. Janet was on the wire.

"I've—found out something, Kent," she said rather unsteadily. "I've had a funny feeling all along. To-day, I took Tom Haney in the house and he began to explain how he'd made a working model of the apparatus that makes the gravity fields. He said he could make a bigger one that would not only neutralize any Roller the other man can make, but one that would burn out the other man's outfit besides. He asked me if he should do it. He said—he said that with gravity-control there was unlimited power available, and he could get very rich if I wanted him to, and he'd give me everything in the world—"

Kent growled.

"If you married him! Damn him—"

"Wait a minute, Kent!" Janet's voice still wasn't steady. "That came later. I asked him, then, if the 'other man' he talked about wasn't a myth. If it hadn't been he who made the tornado to get a stake out of the insurance money; if he didn't make the Rollers in the mountains, and if it wasn't he, with clock-work to direct the controls, who'd made this Roller of to-day to overwhelm alike the stolen torpedo-plane and the men who stole the idea. And he stared at me, and saw I was sure, and he admitted it!"

Kent made incoherent noises into the transmitter.

"I—felt sorry for him, Kent," said Janet. "He thought he was working so cleverly, and I'd seen through him. He made that awful falling sensation in uncle's office as a favor to you, to convince somebody that you knew what you were talking about. It did, as you know. He thought that presently he'd come forward and defeat this imaginary other man with your help, and nobody would ever know. He told me desperately that at first he planned only revenge on those who had robbed him. Then he met me and he—wanted to marry me. If I wished, he'd make me the richest woman in the world. And—and then when he saw my face when he spoke of my marrying him, and he—looked as if I'd stabbed him, Kent!"

Again Kent was too much wrought up for coherent speech.

"So he—was pitiful, Kent! He said he was crazy to think of love. He was half crazy with shame and disappointment. And he's going to go back to his original plans. The Marble firm has robbed him. He's going to wipe them out and put an end to himself at the same time. And he—went storming out and I—cried, Kent! I felt so sorry for him! But he—he's going to kill somebody! I think he's going to

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make another Roller, bigger and more terrible than any of the rest. And—Kent, I'm frightened!"

CHAPTER V.

POTOMAC ROLLER!

FOR two additional days Kent put up a continuing fight to convince men he had already failed to convince. Janet's uncle added every atom of prestige he could command and every particle of influence he could bring to bear, to have Kent's story—now expanded by Haney's admission of responsibility for the Rollers—accepted and acted on by some person in authority. And the ultimate result was a wholly perfunctory promise that Haney would be looked for and taken to a police-station for questioning. The story was wrong. It did hang together. It did provide a motive for the production of the Rollers. It did explain to a certain extent how the Rollers were made. It did check with the fact that Haney had been haunting the Army and Navy Building, struggling to get a hearing, and that he claimed to have i n v e n t e d the torpedo-plane now credited with destroying the monster Roller of the Aberdeen proving-grounds. The story was satisfactory in every way but one. But it contradicted Einstein. And since nobody but a mathematician could understand even a part of Einstein's doctrine of gravity—why—that doctrine was held by all who could not understand it to be an eternal verity. Any statement which contradicted Einstein could not be true.

Officialdom was tolerant and not even openly amused. Kent was conceded to be well-meaning. But Haney was dismissed as just another of those cranks who infest the Army and Navy Building. He was cracked. If he sent threats to the representatives of the munitions firm which had stolen his invention, he would be locked up. But this tale of Haney being the maker of the Rollers was absurd on the face of it. If it wasn't improbable enough that any man-made machine could handle hundreds of thousands of tons of earth and stone and mud at one time, it was impossible because it would contradict Einstein.

Kent worked desperately. He made himself ridiculous, and knew it. But he did not care, now. The thing had gone beyond a mere matter of casualty insurance. Kent liked Haney. He felt a warm admiration for him and a genuine fondness for him, and he could sympathize with the bitterness which filled him. But for Haney's repulsive body, he would undoubtedly have been successful in all his undertakings. But that bitterness was carrying him, now, to the point where he would take human lives. The weapon at his disposal was a terrible one, not like a revolver which may kill six men but only one at a time. Haney's monstrous creation could be controlled only to a certain extent. It would kill by wholesale with a ghastly impartiality. And Haney was bitter enough and reckless enough to kill a thousand human beings in order to avenge himself. He had cause for hatred not only against the men who had robbed him, but the world which had made him a pariah.

IN two days Kent was regarded as a pest and a crank, and was more or less openly suspected of trying a freak scheme to gain personal publicity. There was no search being made for Haney. There was not one living human being aside from Janet and her uncle who believed in his statement that

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the Rollers were man-made. In fact, the eminent scientist who had devised a phony explanation of the seeming oscillations of the office-building now came forward with an official explanation of the Rollers. The explanation was tortuous and involved, contained mathematical formulæ of bewildering intricacy, and was understood by nobody at all, whereby it improved even upon Einstein's relativity theorem, which at least was understood by twelve men.

But the official explanation did reach a gratifying conclusion. It linked the Rollers to magnetic variations of long period and prophesied that while a certain number of new Rollers might appear, that the time of their greatest frequency was past and they would vanish from the earth almost as abruptly as they had appeared upon it.

The explanation appeared at an opportune time. Pictures of the Aberdeen Roller were in every rotogravure section. One daring news-reel photographer had even taken a movie of it from a plane during a part of its travel. Supplemented by views of the devastation left in its trail and the wreckage made by its collapse, that news-reel sent nearly all the Atlantic seaboard into unofficial jitters which diminished only with distance from Washington. California newspapers, holding to a storm-theory of the Rollers' origin, insisted that the Rollers would reach their most deadly size and form in Florida. Florida newspapers held with equal tenacity to a view that the Rollers were manifestations of volcanic energy, and pointing to the solitary active volcano in the United States hinted darkly that Rollers of unexampled size and deadliness would shortly appear on the Pacific Coast.

While all this went on, one eminent scientist reflected complacently on the virtues of really unintelligible writing, and nervous people between Maine and Key West turned pale at every roll of thunder, in the belief that it might be another Roller.

Kent worked. After two days he abandoned all hope of having Haney searched for by authority. He devoted his whole time to searching for Haney himself. He had one clue and a chain of reasoning. The clue was that the men hated most were still in Washington, and that the contract which would reward their theft of an invention from Haney would be signed shortly. The line of reasoning was that Haney would try to overwhelm them at the moment of their greatest triumph, when the contract had just been signed. He'd tried something like that at Aberdeen. And to do such a thing he had to be in Washington to watch the progress of events which might be possible to the situation.

Kent searched, racking his brains for every stray word Haney had uttered, every faintest indication of where he might have his headquarters. He found where Haney bought newspapers, but he appeared there no longer. He found where Haney had had his shoes shined, but the bootblack had not seen him for three days. And then he learned where Haney bought his tobacco. That was a clue indeed, but Kent was rather desperate about then. The torpedo-plane contract would be signed in a few hours more. Haney would probably strike immediately afterward. And he had to be stopped!

IT was a warm, foggy morning, when the streets and walls were glistening with dew and the sun shone palely through the mist it was already dissipating. The Potomac was

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nearly invisible, though the top of the fog bank could be seen from shore and tendrils of vapor curled upward to prove the fog thinning.

Kent called Janet and reported his clue. Haney, seen the day before. He bought tobacco as usual, and started in such-and-such a direction, also as usual.

"I'm within a block or two of him," said Kent, trying to feign confidence. "I'll find him! The worst of it is—"

"Wait!" said Janet quickly. "I wanted to tell you. I had no way to reach you. He called me up twenty minutes ago. He wanted to be sure I was home. He told me to stay here. Not under any circumstances to leave home. He said it would be dangerous."

Kent groaned. "He loves you," he said bitterly, "and wants to be sure you're safe! That clinches it! He's going to pull his stuff to-day. This morning!"

"Where are you?" demanded Janet. "I'm coming down to help you hunt. The two of us are the only ones who'd know him surely, or could do anything with him—"

"You stay where you are!" commanded Kent in a panic.

"I'll be on Eighth Street, where that warehouse was destroyed, in twenty minutes," said Janet crisply. "Meet me there, Kent!"

She hung up before he could protest. When he rang back, frantically, she had already gone out.

Kent had been desperate enough before. Now he was frankly scared. Not for himself, of course. With other lives in danger, he meant to search desperately until the last, possible instant. But Janet was different! She ought to stay out of this!

He met her, and wasted what he was sure were precious minutes trying urgently to persuade her to go back. She was adamantine.

"You're wasting time," she said coolly. "If it's dangerous for me, it's dangerous for you too, and you're not backing out. And there's a policeman watching us, Kent. You're excited, and he thinks we're having a quarrel he may be called on to stop. I'm not going back. I'm going to help search. Now, you start here and go halfway around the block. I'll try the opposite direction. We'll meet on the other side . . ."

Ten minutes, worrying about Janet. Twenty minutes. He saw her twice. She'd found nothing. He'd had no more success. Thirty minutes. The fog was a mere thin haze, now. A radio in somebody's house broke off short in the middle of a tune. A man's voice began to bark out of it. *"Warning to citizens of Washington! Warning! A Roller has been sighted down the Potomac, moving up the river. All persons near the banks of the river are urged to leave their houses and move as far away as possible. Traffic moving into the possibly endangered section is being limited to empty cars which will take on passengers to carry them away. All school-children are being cared for by the authorities. They are safe . . ."*

Kent groaned. He met Janet, and she was more than a little pale. A swift, babbling exodus began. People actually near the river-bank did not wait for cars to come and get them. They fled on foot, to be picked up as they crowded toward the Pennsylvania Avenue line of the city. Kent went doggedly on with his searching. A police motorcycle and side-car came popping slowly through the street. A policeman shouted the warning through a megaphone. He repeated it. Again.

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The motorcycle and side-car popped slowly away.

WITH amazing swiftness the houses emptied into the streets and the streets emptied altogether. A police motorcycle dashed by, and the officer on it shouted a warning to Kent. Then he dashed on.

It was very quiet, now. Inland, in the city, there was a bubbling sound of voices and honking cars. An overworked police department strained every nerve to take care of thousands of refugees fleeing at five minutes' notice or less. The people did not have to be taken far, but they needed to be taken fast. Trucks, cars, trolleys—every possible means of transport packed itself with scared humanity and raced away from the banks of the Potomac . . .

Kent searched among empty streets. In one house a radio had been left turned on. He heard its droning echoing in the silence. *"The Roller is larger than that of Aberdeen. It is moving up-river at about fifteen miles an hour, becoming more solid as it moves. Naval planes are preparing to bomb it, in hopes of shattering it as the Aberdeen Roller was shattered by the Marble torpedo-plane. . . ."*

Kent continued to search. He saw Janet, very pale. She had found nothing. Haney was near here. He must be near here! They separated . . .

Heavy boomings came from down-river. Naval planes were dropping bombs on the Roller. Dull, distant concussions sounded. But they kept right on.

This Roller was not being shattered by five-hundred-pound or thousand-pound explosions of gun-cotton. It seemed to Kent, straining his ears, that he heard a far-away murmur between those explosions. It was the sound of the Roller. He searched . . .

Then he saw Haney. Haney was in his shirt-sleeves, comfortably smoking a pipe. He stood in a window that overlooked the Potomac and he stared down the river. Kent's mouth opened to shout. Then he checked himself. His eyes turned to follow Haney's gaze.

Miles and miles away down the river, above the yellow, lifting haze, he saw the rounded, glistening top of a monster Thing. He could see the sun glitter on its liquidness. He could see that it was moving. And it was huge! The Aberdeen Roller had been five hundred feet high and a twenty-story office-building would not have reached its mid-point. This was larger yet. It was a mountain in movement! It moved forward, and rolled as it came, and Kent saw its foremost surface descend with a vast, a terrifying deliberation. It rolled . . . And Haney watched it come, smoking very deliberately.

Kent cursed to himself. Too late to call a policeman, even if all the police had not fled. No cop would waste time arresting a harmless crank when a city, and himself with it, seemed probably doomed to destruction within minutes.

Raging at his own helplessness, even the broken arm still in splints, Kent dived into the two-story house from whose upper window Haney composedly watched destruction approach. He scrambled up the unpainted, indifferently scrubbed steps to the second floor. He burst into a door, the only one that could possibly lead into the room in which Haney was.

THE door flew wide. And Haney had heard him coming. He probably didn't know who it was, but he had a revolver out and bearing

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savagely as Kent hurtled into the room. And he kept it bearing when he recognized Kent.

"Tom!" said Kent desperately. "You've got to stop that thing! You'll kill people! Hundreds of them! Thousands, maybe! Dammit, man, you can't be a murderer! Stop it!"

"That's no reason," said Haney, very calmly but with a surpassing bitterness. "And don't think, Kent, that I won't shoot you if you try to start anything. I'm going to be killed in a little while. I'm past caring about anything. I've been robbed of everything I ever did and everything I ever wanted. I'm smashing up some few thieves to-day. Some of the men I'd like to get have probably run away, but I'll get some of them. And people who've laughed at me and sneered at me will get theirs too. I'm no murderer! I'm going with them, and I'll laugh at them all when we go together down to hell!"

"But Tom! My God, man—"

"And I won't leave anything behind for anybody to steal!" said Haney fiercely. "I've got dynamite planted here. When I've finished up my job I'll bring the Roller back. And just before it hits this house I set off the dynamite. I'm finished, Kent! You can get out if you like. It's probably too late to save your life anyhow, but you can try. I'll surely kill you if you try to stop me, though!"

Kent said desperately:

"But Tom! Janet's down there! You'll kill her too!"

Haney started.

"You lie!"

For answer, Kent went to the window. He shouted.

He saw the Roller again. It was nearer. It was more huge, more monstrous than any other thing which was ever the work of man. It nearly blocked the river. As Kent glanced agonizedly at it, he saw it roll upon and obliterate a steamer.

Half a minute later the shattered, wrecked hull of that steamer appeared at the top of the Roller, becoming incorporated into its mass and descending with the glistening substance of the Roller's forward surface.

Janet cried out in the street below. She came hurrying into the house. She came up the stairs. Haney faced her, his face a mask of consuming bitterness. The Roller was opposite Alexandria. It swept on up the river...

"Tom!" said Janet imploringly. "You mustn't do it! You mustn't! You'll kill hundreds, thousands of people! You can't do it, Tom!"

Haney said in a corroding cynicism:

"Were you looking for me to promise to marry me if I drop everything and become a respectable multimillionaire instead of a murderer?"

Janet stared at him, very pale. Her hands were clenched tightly.

"No, Tom. You wouldn't believe me anyhow. And it wouldn't be so. I'm just asking you."

Haney looked bitterly at her. The sound of the Roller came in the open window. It loomed high, now, across the bed of the Potomac. Water did not rise because of the obstruction to its flow. The Roller did not stop the river from flowing. It absorbed the flow. It loomed twice, three times higher than any building in the city. The Monument itself was dwarfed, as well by the height as by the incredible bulk of the Roller. And its noise was the washing of a thousand Niagaras and the roaring of a hundred avalanches...

Kent saw it beginning to change its course. It was swinging—a mountain,

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a flood, sheer death and destruction—to roll over and demolish the city . . .

"Yes," said Haney bitterly, "that's the truth! You wouldn't marry me under any circumstances! But you tell me the truth. It's too late to stop the damned thing now! If I let it collapse it would simply smash everything! . . . Wait!"

HE plunged into another room. They heard him moving swiftly. There were little clicking sounds. Janet caught a glimpse of him working feverishly at an intricate, make-shift key-board which controlled an apparatus of bewildering complexity.

She saw a large-scale map tacked against the wall. Haney worked very swiftly.

She turned to the window. The Roller had shifted its course. It was swinging in a great arc to roll over and obliterate the city. But now a great rift appeared in it. Another. It swung sharply back, staggering as its controlling force-fields pulled it this way and that.

Haney came back, his eyes burning.

"It'll go on up the river," he said harshly. "For your sake, Janet! And you wouldn't love me if I were the last man on earth!"

The roar of the Roller drew nearer yet. Now its speed seemed to be terrific. Great masses of mud and water dripped from it. It was two hundred yards away. One hundred yards away. It went past them, and they could see that it was still a hollow shell. All the matter it had gathered up did not fill its monster belly. It was a hollow cylinder—but in its center there was such chaos that the three of them, gazing into its depths, seemed to be looking straight into hell.

It was past. It rolled on. It struck a bridge and assimilated it. It rolled across a part of the beautiful parked Embankment, and left raw earth and festering mud behind it. It rolled on and on. . . .

"I've been robbed again," said Haney harshly. "Of everything I ever accomplished, and everything I ever wanted.—The Roller's above the town now. I'll let it smash."

He went again into the other room. They heard a spark chirp musically as he broke a contact. Then, somewhere, there was a terrific impact. They felt the building quiver as—miles away—the Roller crashed down into one vast heap of chaotic confusion. Haney stood in the doorway, facing them. His face was like death.

"You didn't lie to me, Janet," he said harshly. "That accounts for it all! But I expected to die to-day, and I won't be robbed of that! I told you I had dynamite planted, Kent. I'm exploding it. Get Janet out of here before it goes off!"

He slammed the door. They heard him bar it. And Kent's old fondness for his friend returned in a rush. He battered at the door until Janet dragged frantically at him . . . She just got him out into the open when there was a shattering explosion and a cloud of evil, rancid smoke . . .

EVERYBODY remembered the Rollers. For something better than two weeks they were certainly the strangest and toward the end the most terrible of all known natural phenomena. Because they are still called natural. Of course. Kent and Janet made no effort to prove, after Haney's death, that Haney had made them. Why should they? His apparatus was smashed and it operated in a fashion which contradicted Einstein.

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Nobody would have believed them, and Kent had had enough of fighting official stupidity. He'd only have been laughed at again.

So, on the whole, Kent probably lost something by the coming of the Rollers. But other people benefited a great deal. A certain munitions firm landed a fat contract for torpedo-planes by its neat demonstration of a trial plane against the Aberdeen Roller. And an eminent scientist who predicted the end of the Rollers had his reputation enormously enhanced when they actually did cease to appear. His explanation of their origin is so obscure that nobody at all can understand it, whereby he is in some sense superior to Einstein whom twelve men understood. And there was another group of people who benefitted by the Rollers. When the last one smashed, it narrowed the Potomac remarkably. And there is a new and exclusive real-estate development upon this new-made ground. Somebody made quite a lot out of that, too. But Kent did not care. After all, he still had Janet.

THE END

Claiming the Sea

EVERY third year the dignitaries of Cork, Ireland, perform a ceremony which would impress most visitors as totally useless. On the first Thursday of September the mayor puts on ceremonial robes and embarks in a small steamer. He takes along his sword-bearer, the city treasurer, town clerk, the town council and a brass band. Nearly everybody has on a ceremonial robe.

The band plays and the steamer heads out several miles, arriving at an imaginary point which is supposed to mark the outer boundary of Cork. The boat drifts. The mayor goes to its prow, where one of his henchmen hands him a javelin of mahogany, winged and tipped with bronze. The mayor takes the position of a javelin-thrower, which he has no doubt practiced in front of his mirror, and hurls the weapon into the sea. This gives him control of the harbor.

J. W. Holden.

UH-OH! CATCHING COLD!... TIME TO USE VICKS VA-TRO-NOL
•JUST A FEW DROPS UP EACH NOSTRIL•
I'VE ALREADY GOT A COLD ...VICKS VAPORUB TONIGHT!
•JUST RUB ON THROAT & CHEST•
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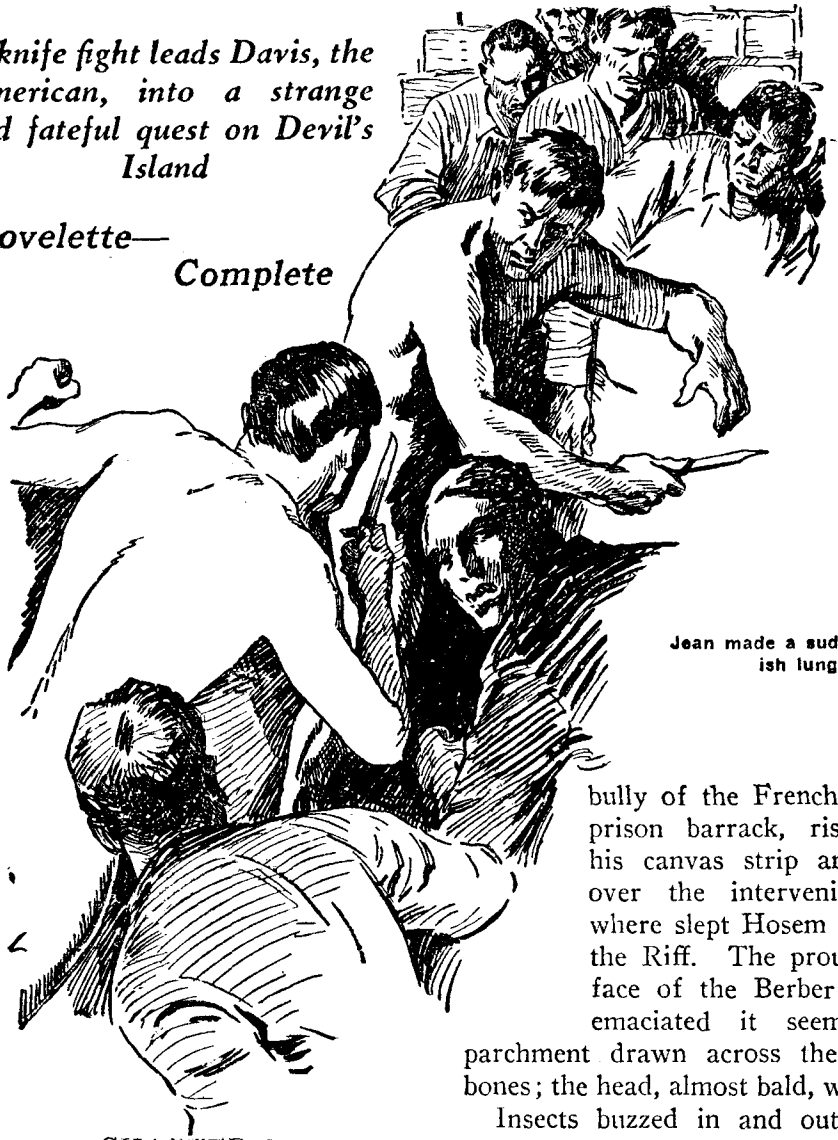
The Sacred Sword

By TOM CURRY

Author of "Escape or Die," "Demerara Diamonds," etc.

A knife fight leads Davis, the American, into a strange and fateful quest on Devil's Island

Novelette—Complete



Jean made a sudden tiger-ish lunge

CHAPTER I.

KNIFE FIGHT.

ACROSS Davis' big form fell elongated black shadows that broke the rectangle of brilliant moonlight. He lay, watching Jean, bully of the French Guiana prison barrack, rise from his canvas strip and bend over the intervening cot, where slept Hosem ben Ali, the Riff. The proud, dark face of the Berber was so emaciated it seemed but parchment drawn across the jutting bones; the head, almost bald, was back.

Insects buzzed in and out of the thick bars, taking toll of men who yearned for such freedom. It was hard to stir in the clinging heat; in Guiana it was every man for himself, and there was no reason for Davis to interfere.

Davis could not guess then what his

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sympathy for the sick Riff would mean: robbery, murder, peril that he would be unable to guard against, the stirring up of a hatred that would follow him to the bitter end. Yet there remained in the American vestiges of his former manhood, and the trait that forces the strong to aid the weak.

A weak light bulb shone between the bars at the end of the room, glinting on the steel blade in Jean's paw, as the Frenchman searched the folds of Hosem's covers. The sick man woke from his fitful rest, groaned; Jean raised the dagger with a muttered threat. Davis leaped up, seized Jean's wrist, bent it back.

"*Nom de nom—*" swore Jean, breaking back against the canvas; "but I'll rip out your guts, American!"

The man they fought over was too weak to resist; he fixed bright, ebony-black eyes on Davis, his defender. It was pity that made Davis step between the *zéphyr* and his victim, though he knew such a move meant trouble—Jean was stupid, brutal, loud.

"Let him alone, I said," growled Davis.

Other *bagnards* in the long line of forty strips—across the six-foot aisle were others—had been wakened from troubled sleep by the row. None save the strongest dared oppose Jean, several had died for it. So far Davis had managed to avoid him. Jean lowered his bull head. "*Bien,* Davis, you've asked for it. Come on, you know the rules."

Davis squared his shoulders. "Give me a knife," he ordered. Prisoners, gathered around, hoping something might befall Jean, who was making life miserable for them. One thrust a blade into Davis' hand, gave him a slap on the back, toward the lavatory at the end. There such battles took place in the dead of night, ending with death for one of the combatants. In the morning the *surveillants* would find a slashed corpse, and no one could say anything about it. Jean was survivor of six such affairs.

The lavatory was dark, but convicts brought two hand-made lamps, condensed-milk tins filled with kerosene, bits of cloth for wicks. The flickering flames lit bare stone walls, showed Jean, tattooed chest heaving, stripped naked—no blood must be found on the victor—crouched, eyes red with rage. As soon as Davis had taken off his clothes Jean advanced.

Guiana, with its murderous sun, fever, bad food and water, had not yet shattered Davis; in Africa he'd been hardened. Sanguine by nature, he'd never given up hope of escape. In Guiana was no present, only remembrance that tortured, and ephemeral hope. All those there were either physical and mental wrecks, waiting for death, or, like Davis, husbanding resources till the time came to strike for freedom.

JEAN stood a moment, as though hesitating to attack, to throw Davis off guard. He made a sudden tigerish lunge, his knife ripping up at Davis' belly. Davis, having witnessed the other fights, was ready for this, leaped aside, passing so close to Jean he could have plunged his blade into Jean's back.

"*Sacré nom!*" swore Jean.

He whirled, lunged again, his point missing Davis by an inch, powerful forearm cracking on Davis' wrist, whipping Davis' dagger from his grip. As it clattered on the stone, Jean uttered a triumphant cry, sprang in to kill him. But Davis caught the raised arm, threw his weight on it, twisting it

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behind Jean's neck, bending him double; with an upward wrench he broke Jean's grip, disarming him. The *zéphyr* rolled out of the hold and they clinched, sweating bodies strained. In the yellow beams of the unsteady lamps their contorted faces and bulging muscles pictured the efforts they made.

Davis suddenly fell away, landed on his spine; Jean came tumbling over him as Davis yanked him, threw him heavily against the jagged stone wall. Jean rose, tried to reach his knife; Davis hit him in the chin, snapping back his head. As Jean was straightened by the blow, Davis hit him in the belly. Rage burned hot in the American as he battered the bully back, hitting him under his clumsy guard or through it. Not until Jean's face was a pulp did the Frenchman collapse, smashed, bleeding. He lay still, glaring up. Groggy from the exertion, Davis picked up the knives; a contented sigh ran through the spectators as Jean awaited death.

Davis stood over him. "Keep away from the sick one and me," he ordered. "That's all." And turned to leave.

Murmurs of protest arose, a man caught Davis' arm. "Slit him. Open his belly!"

Davis shook his head, returned to his bed. He threw himself down, turning on his side, and saw that his neighbor's bright eyes were fixed on him. Jean was carried in. "Take him to the other end," ordered Davis. "Keep him away from here."

When finally the barrack had quieted. Davis heard a low whisper calling him. He rose, picked up a water jug, held it to the Berber's thin lips. But the dark-faced man said, "No!"

"What is it, then, Hosem?"

Hosem ben Ali drew his long brown hand from under his dirty blanket, spoke French with thin, dry accent, hardly enough life in him to articulate. "Don't let that *kelb roumi* touch me!" he gasped. He thrust a roll of bank notes into Davis' palm.

The money made Davis' heart leap. With it he could escape. Not through the murderous jungle strangling them on three sides, nor along the treacherous coast in a frail cockleshell, but in style. Painfully as he had scrimped, he had managed to save but a few francs; now he had a fortune.

"But you need this yourself, Caid."

The thin form stiffened. "You know me?"

"I was in Morocco."

Hosem shuddered. "Morocco! If I could but die there. In the *djehad*, the Holy War, I was a mighty man, the chosen of Mulay Mohammed Abd el-Krim—" He stopped suddenly.

"I can't take your savings," Davis growled.

"It's nothing. You saved me from that Christian dog—you're not French?"

"American."

"Good. Keep the money, for when I die it will only be stolen from me. I don't fear death, I've been true to the Faith. Yet, each day I can hold on, perhaps I'll see *him*."

"Who, Caid?"

"My son, Hassan. If only he'd come! If I should die before he comes, you—"

HOSEM closed his eyes. Now Davis understood the meaning of Hosem's eager glances each time the gate opened—he was waiting for his son. Davis put the francs in a secret pocket, meaning next morning to hide them more carefully when he could.

Hosem ben Ali had been carried on

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a stretcher to the dormitory three days before, dumped on the cot. He was but one of the numerous nationalities over which France held sway: Riffs from Morocco, Algiers; Javanese, East Indians; Africans from the desert and Madagascar; white, brown, yellow, black men who had fallen foul of France's laws. Davis had given the Riff water, tried to ease him in small ways. Hosem had silently watched him. Davis understood that the caid had been brought over from the dread Devil's Isle, in the storm-tossed sea off the Guianan coast, where men went mad in their little stone huts.

Dawn broke with the sudden glory of the tropics. But in the midst of this beauty was only ugliness for the prisoners.

They rose wearily, waiting for guards to open the gates so they could resume their forced labor in jungle, river and ditches.

Jean scowled at Davis from the far end of the room. On the edge of his cot, Davis looked at Hosem. The old Riff's cheeks were ashen, his breathing so faint it did not stir his blanket. His lips moved, his hands raised weakly; Davis bent over him.

"Stay after the others go," whispered the Riff.

Locks turned; two keepers in solar topee and white uniform, Ruby pistols at their sides, umbrellas in hand, appeared.

The *forçats* filed out, Jean among the first.

Hosem began whispering to Davis: "I don't dare delay longer. Your hand shall be the instrument—Great is Allah and Mohammed his Prophet is also great— Take this, guard it with your life."

Davis curiously scanned the small paper Hosem pushed on him. It contained a series of penciled numerals in Arabic—Hosem ben Ali, though a Riff, was educated, more religious than most of his kind.

"What shall I do with this?" Davis asked.

"Give it to my son Hassan, along with my Koran."

Then Davis glimpsed at the gate the brutal face of Jean. But Hosem ben Ali gripped him, pulled him close. "The day will come when Allah will reward you," he gasped. "*La Illah Illah Allah*—" His breath was coming in terrible gasps.

"Careful—here's a guard," Davis warned, placing the hand which held the paper on Hosem's. "It's Commandant Rabat, and Jean—"

Hosem quivered as life shot back into his frail body, impelled by spirit greater than death. He snatched back the paper from Davis and covered his face with his blanket.

JEAN, leading a French keeper, came toward them. Commandant Rabat crossed the dormitory, caught Davis by the throat, throwing him back across the cot.

"Give me the paper," he ordered impatiently.

"What paper?" snarled Davis—he hated Rabat.

"Don't let him lie to you M'sieu' le Commandant; I saw the Riff pass him that map," cried Jean. "*Oui,* I saw—"

"Shut up, *bagnard.* Search him, see what he has."

With malicious pleasure Jean stepped to Davis, who kicked at him. Rabat flushed, whipped out his Ruby. "It's my order!" he shouted. "I'll shoot you if you resist, Davis."

Davis knew Rabat, most brutal of men; he had a short temper, liked to show off his all-powerful authority

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over the cowed convicts. He had killed more than one, and it would give him nothing but pleasure to shoot another. Jean was searching Davis, and the *zéphyr* was skillful, for he knew just how prisoners hid the contraband francs they kept. He found the wad of money Hosem had given the American.

Rabat snatched it, growled, "Prisoners may not have cash."

Davis shook with fury. To strike a guard was punishable by death, but he tried to get at Rabat. Rabat cocked his gun, snapped, "But the paper—where is it?"

"I can't find it," Jean confessed, as Davis subsided under the gun.

"Look in his knapsack, on the shelf, in the cot."

Rabat raised the blanket from Hosem's face. "This is ready for the bamboos," he growled. "He's dead."

Pity for the old Riff struck Davis; yet at the same time he was almost envious, for death was at least a release. Hosem lay stiff, lips tightly clenched, head back. Rabat went through Hosem's pockets and bag, but found no cash, nor the paper. He turned to Davis and Jean.

"You two swine get a barrow, take this to the cemetery," he ordered, and Davis heard his repressed breath whistle through his curved nose. Rabat seemed to be trying to hide excitement. When Davis picked Hosem's Koran from the narrow shelf, Rabat snatched it from him, ran quickly through the leaves.

"Why'd you try to take that?" Rabat demanded suspiciously.

Davis shrugged. "Simply to read a prayer for him," he replied.

Rabat laughed, flung the sacred book at Davis. "Go ahead, then, bring the barrow, fool. You too, Jean—*vite.*"

Jean led the way to the yard, and they found an old wheelbarrow. At the convict factory they picked up a wooden box for a coffin.

"I'm going to beat your head off for squealing," Davis growled at the *zéphyr,* as they started back to get the body.

"You won't get a chance," Jean replied. "You got yourself in a pretty kettle, losing that paper. Yes, it's something important Rabat's after, let me tell you. That Hosem was leader of a great tribe that fought under Abd el-Krim when the Spaniards were thrown back, and France forced to wage a great war against the Moslems."

Davis wheeled the barrow into the barrack, where Rabat awaited them. Rabat motioned silently to the corpse, watched as they loaded it on; he kicked both convicts to hurry them out.

They wheeled Hosem through the gate, to the dirty streets of St. Laurent du Maroni. Across the river lay Dutch Guiana. Prisoners in gangs or alone on errands passed to and fro; the single-storied huts teemed with blacks, mulattoes, Chinese, strange mixed breeds who stared with contempt on white convicts.

Entering the bamboo-circled graveyard where open holes awaited the daily supply of dead ones, Davis took a final look at the stern, lined face of Hosem ben Ali. There was no terror in Hosem's expression, only relief; he had gone to join the Faithful in the Groves of Allah.

Davis took the Koran from his pocket.

Not being able to read the Arabic lettering, he looked silently at it as a rough gesture.

There was a deep line of puzzled concentration in the American's tanned brow; he had been as yet unable to

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think clearly, ponder on the mysterious disappearance of that paper.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGER.

IN the sweltering barrack once more, they found Rabat had left. Jean stayed away from Davis, fearing another punching, though he took care to display the handle of a new knife. Davis lay on his strip, covered his face with his arms.

But he had no rest; a keeper came, ordered Jean and Davis to the Commandant's quarters across the courtyard. Rabat scowled at them, curtly shoved Jean aside, stepped to Davis.

"Come," he cried in a very loud voice, "where did you hide that paper Hosem ben Ali gave you, Davis? *Vite*—I've no time to waste on swine."

Davis' hatred for Rabat for having robbed him, against the French for sending him to die in Guiana, was greater now than ever. He shook his head, not daring to open his lips lest he express what he felt, drive Rabat to murder. But that was what Rabat seemed to want; he smashed a hand to Davis' mouth. Jean grinned, pleased to see the blood spurt from his enemy's lip. Davis trembled violently, white-hot anger burning him; as Rabat followed him in, driving him back against the wall, he could hold himself no longer. He hit Rabat in the jaw with all his force.

It was an offense only death could pay for. Rabat, reeling back, went purple, shook until Davis thought he was having a stroke; then he whipped out his gun. Davis, head up, waited for the bullet.

The sudden opening of the door stopped Rabat.

"What goes on here?" demanded the man who had entered.

Davis turned slowly. The newcomer was a Frenchman, tall, lean, in whites; his face intelligent, magnetic. There was something fine about him, as though he belonged in another world to the brute Guiana; his quick black eyes were shrewd, held a fire lacking in most men. Davis had never before seen him.

"What is it, Rabat?" he demanded again. "Why are you beating this poor fellow?"

Rabat slipped the Ruby back into its holster. "He's just a *bagnard* dog," he replied thickly. "He hit me."

Davis had no idea of receiving mercy; the least he could expect would be years of imprisonment in the solitary pits of Ile St. Joseph, if not death.

"You shouldn't be so tough," the tall man said severely. "You *surveillants* have no pity. Why were you beating him?"

"M'sieu' le Colonel, he's hidden a valuable paper and won't say where it is."

"A paper?" the colonel repeated in surprise. "What is this paper, then, something necessary to the prison?"

"No. I was questioning him politely, and he struck me—Jean will swear it."

The colonel looked sympathetically at Davis. He said, "Rabat, take this Jean and wait outside. I wish to speak alone to this man."

RABAT, face still burning, slammed the door. The tall Frenchman turned to Davis. "Sit down," he ordered gently, and drew cigarettes from his pockets, gave one to the American.

"Perhaps you don't know me. I'm

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Colonel Paul de Parien." His musical voice was easy, no sharp edges to it. He sat close to Davis, smoked as though with a comrade. "These guards are brutal," de Parien continued. "That's one reason I'm here, to investigate conditions, and I wish to hear your story in full. But first tell me what is this paper about which Rabat makes such a fuss."

Davis, brows drawn as he listened, suddenly laughed. De Parien's face clouded for a fleeting instant. "To hit a guard is a grave offense, Davis. But I can get you off, provided you're willing to help me." He put long, delicately powerful fingers on Davis' arm. "And I want to help you, too. I see we understand each other."

"Where are you from?" demanded Davis.

"Paris."

"The Parisian sun is then as strong as that of Guiana—or Morocco, for instance? You're brown as a Berber."

"Yes, I've spent much time in Africa," de Parien replied innocently.

"It was a lucky break for me you chanced to be standing so close to Rabat's door just now."

De Parien's eyes narrowed. At last he said, between his teeth, "All right then. Tell me where that paper is and I'll have you pardoned."

Davis sucked in his breath sharply. "You can protect me from this mad dog Rabat? He has power here."

"*Certainement.*" Eagerness crept into de Parien's voice.

"You know why I'm in Guiana—for attacking an officer in the Legion, while on war duty? It happens he was one of Rabat's friends, and Rabat knows."

"Never worry about this Rabat," de Parien replied.

"I understand M'sieu' le Colonel was just now playing a little game with me," Davis went on. "Well, I'm playing a game too—life or death for me. Rabat will kill me for that blow, if I don't die otherwise. Will m'sieu' pardon me if I say I don't trust Frenchmen—of course, you're a different type from these keepers."

"That's understood. And the map?"

Davis looked again into those quick, brilliant eyes. They told him nothing. "Map," he repeated. "You wish the map Hosem ben Ali gave me, is that it? *Alors*—I hid it in my empty oil tin, on my barrack shelf."

A veil lifted from de Parien's eyes, and immense relief broke over his face, fierce joy. With a sharp cry, without looking again at Davis, he sprang to his feet and dashed out.

Rabat stepped in at once, approached Davis.

"Stand up," he bellowed. "Now he's finished with you, you'll answer to me for that blow." He slapped Davis across the mouth.

Davis slipped from the chair, put it between the guard and himself.

Rabat continued, "I'm sending you to St. Joseph, the black cell. De Parien can't help you, won't do it."

"I see that," replied Davis.

"You're the sort of insubordinate who hits his superior," continued Rabat furiously. "You nearly killed my friend in Morocco."

THEY were facing one another, Davis waiting for the end, Rabat gloating, when de Parien burst back into the room. "Is this your lamp tin, then?" he asked, thrusting an empty can under Davis' eyes.

Davis nodded.

"There's nothing in it," cried de Parien. "Didn't you tell me the paper was hidden in this?"

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"Yes. And m'sieu' told me he'd protect me from Rabat. Both of us are liars," Davis replied.

De Parien gestured in disgust.

"You fool! I was so anxious to get the paper I forgot you for the moment. Simply say where Hosem's map is, I'll keep my word."

Davis shook his head.

"I'm afraid M'sieu' le Colonel is simply a Rabat Frenchman after all."

De Parien took a step toward him, long hands working convulsively; for a moment Davis thought he meant to hit him. Then de Parien bit his lip, turned to Rabat.

"You say you carefully searched the Riff's clothes?"

"Yes. Also the American's."

"And found—"

"Nothing."

"Except my money, which you stole, Rabat," Davis said.

"Shut up," Rabat shouted. "Prisoners may not have money; it'll be kept for you."

"On tap in your pocket," snarled Davis.

Rabat started for him; but de Parien impatiently stopped him.

"It *was* a map, then, that the Riff gave you?" he asked.

Davis shrugged, said nothing.

"It must have been a map," de Parien continued. "Perhaps, Rabat, the *bagnard* hid it, then retrieved it." He stepped to Davis, searched him, found Hosem's Koran, skimmed through its pages. "Nothing," he cried. "This book belonged to the Riff?"

"Yes," answered Davis.

De Parien threw the book down with a curse. "You refuse to say what happened to the paper?"

"I really can't say," Davis replied. "And, after all, if there is a map and I could tell where it is, the fact remains it isn't mine to give nor yours to take."

De Parien stared at him a long moment, then shrugged. "Call the guard, Rabat. Maybe the black cell will jog his memory."

Rabat, pleased, shouted an order, and a uniformed guard, Lebel rifle in hand, saluted from the doorway.

"Take the American to the blockhouse," ordered Rabat.

"Bread and water," added de Parien. "Naked, chains, a hard board."

Davis squared his shoulders.

De Parien closely watched his face. "Doesn't contemplation of the punishment change you?"

"No."

De Parien said, "*Eh bien*, Davis. Go back to work."

Rabat protested angrily. "This will ruin the discipline of the prison, M'sieu' le Colonel! I—"

The stern negative in de Parien's eyes stopped the commandant.

Davis took Hosem's Koran from the table, went through the corridor, past the guards, to the hot courtyard, and out the gate of the big prison.

CHAPTER III.

NEW HOPE.

ST. LAURENT was a prison town. On the outskirts, at the river sawmill, gangs of convicts labored in the broiling sun. Men with the black-stenciled numbers on their frowsy uniforms were a common sight; so were *libérés*, those who had completed prison terms but were condemned to remain for life in French Guiana. There were tawdry little stores, lordly Negroes, Chinese.

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Davis quickly picked his way through the dirty Avenue of Palms, stopped at a dingy whitewashed house and slipped in. He tapped on a paint-peeled door at his right, and a cheery American voice called, "Come in."

Opening the door, Davis stepped into the littered bedroom. A young man in white trousers and shirt and slippers rose to greet him. He was American. He smiled at Davis, flashing large white teeth. Empty whisky bottles stood on the bare table near his cot. Under the tan of his skin there was a pasty color; his blue eyes, while full of sparkle, were deeply underlined with dissipation.

"Hello, Davis," he cried. "Sit down, have a drink. How'd you manage to get away at this time of day?"

Davis sighed heavily, sank into a rickety wicker chair, accepted a drink. "I'm in the soup, Hanson," he said.

Hanson shrugged, grinning his merry, infectious smile. "You've been in it a long while," he replied.

"Yes. But now I've bucked Rabat, and he means to kill me. They've taken all my money."

"What's it all about?" asked Hanson.

Davis told his friend of Hosem, the paper, how he had struck Rabat, of de Parien. Hanson whistled. "You're right, boy, Rabat won't forgive you for socking him. But d'you know where this paper is, what it is? Seems to me if you do you can play it for a pardon, since this de Parien evidently has a lot of power."

"I don't know exactly what the paper says," answered Davis. "It's written in Arabic, you see. And I'm not sure what Hosem did with it—but, thinking it all over, I've come to the conclusion I can make a good guess."

"What's that?"

Davis shook his head, jerked his thumb back over his shoulder. The boarding-house walls were thin. Hanson undersetood.

"Well, take it easy," Hanson cautioned. "Rabat's a tough customer."

Davis was very fond of his friend. Hanson had been an aviator, working for a Dutch company that flew planes along the northern coast of South America. But drink had cost him his job. He was on the beach now, was almost broke, due to his taste for whisky. However, it didn't seem to worry him; he was always merry and ready to cheer a fellow countryman. Davis had met him weeks before when Hanson hurriedly left Dutch Guiana after a scrape. Hanson's comradeship had buoyed him up, helped him endure Guiana.

AFTER a short visit with his friend, Davis went to the gang cutting logs on the Maroni. He kept expecting Rabat to come for him, arrest him, toss him in the guardhouse to await trial for the crime of striking a guard. But the noonday rest came, and he was locked in the long barrack with his mates to wait till two o'clock to resume work.

He lay on the cot next the empty strip where Hosem ben Ali had died. He missed the old Riff, who had tried to pay him for his kindness, yet had made prison worse for him. Now he must begin again, save franc by franc, for escape. Hope was hard to renew.

Usually there was a belote or dice game among the prisoners, but to-day they gathered around Davis, questioning him excitedly.

"It's said you hit Rabat," one said. "How is it you're still alive, *hein?*"

Davis replied, "Don't know. Maybe I haven't got away with it yet."

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"Rabat wants a treasure map you took from the old Riff. What's all this about?"

Davis closed his lips, showed he wouldn't talk. They left him. Such news would travel like wildfire through the prison, through the town.

At two, leaving to fall in with his work squad, Davis passed Commandant Rabat, but the latter didn't even look at him. Strict guard was not kept of prisoners in the town squads. A man might easily slip away, start a break for freedom through the jungle. He might hide on the outskirts of St. Laurent till dark and cross the Maroni to Dutch Guiana, or float down to the sea. And this went on without cessation, convicts running off only to be brought back for punishment or to die in the jungle or sea.

Trailing after the work gang in the streets, Davis bumped into Colonel de Parien, immaculate in whites and sun helmet, smoking a cigarette in the shade of an awning. De Parien looked cool in spite of the heat; his sharp features were clean, tanned; he recognized Davis as the American drew back.

"*Comment ça va?*" he asked kindly. "How goes it?"

"*Ça va bien*—it goes fine," replied Davis sarcastically. "I expect a long vacation on Joseph."

"Don't worry concerning this morning. I now have no need of the Riff's map. The thing is *fini*. Forget it; I've told Rabat not to punish you, Davis."

"A thousand thanks. And my money?"

"Oh, money? I'd have paid you plenty for that paper."

"It's too late, then?"

De Parien's eyes searched his; they saw the rugged, determined face, topped by bleached hair, ran down the powerful frame clad in faded prison uniform to the bare, strong feet, not missing the scarred, dangerous hands of the fighting man.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Too late, Davis."

"After all," Davis drawled, "Hosem's treasure belongs neither to you nor to me. *Au revoir.*"

He passed on slowly, head bowed.

Turning the next corner, he found his friend Hanson waiting for him. The young flier seized his ragged sleeve. "Davis! I've been waiting to speak to you. I got a swell break, in the mail this noon. My family came into some money, sent me five hundred dollars."

Davis' heart leaped. Hanson had promised to help him, if possible. He waited eagerly.

"When you're through work this afternoon, come to Ah Lee's café at the edge of the jungle. I'm going to help you out," Hanson continued. He pressed Davis' hand.

CHAPTER IV.

FREEDOM.

JUST before the guards came to return them to the prison, Davis slipped away from the work squad, hurried to Ah Lee's little café on the outskirts of town. Hope had come back to him, and life ahead, with freedom from Guiana near, was once more interesting. For his friend Hanson he felt great affection.

Ah Lee was a bland old Chink. In the front of his saloon was a large bar; through a short open passage was a back room fitted with tables, the thick bush pressing against one wall. A green parrot screamed in a palm by an open window.

Hanson was waiting for him in the

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rear, rose quickly and led him to a seat. They were alone there in back.

"I have the money," the flier began, patting his pocket. "I'm going to give you a couple of hundred, Davis, which should take you away."

"It will," Davis replied. "I'm sure Rabat's only waiting for a chance to kill me."

"Now, listen," Hanson went on, his face set. "From what you told me this morning, this Riff chief, Hosem, must have passed you a treasure map before he died. You said you might find it. Wait," he went on, as Davis opened his lips, "here's how I feel, Davis. I'll just spend this dough for liquor, be on the beach again. But there must be a fortune hidden in Morocco, and we'd be fools not to try for it. What do you say?"

Davis bit his lip. "Hosem's dead," he replied. "But, after all, Hanson, he told me to give the paper to his son Hassan. I've expected to hear from this Hassan ben Hosem. And it wasn't a map, you see, just Arabic writing."

"I see." Hanson's face was grim. His fingers drummed on the table top. "Tell you what," he said, "I'll stake you to your escape. You can't hang around here much longer, because Rabat may take it into his head to kill you. Tell me where the paper is, and I'll get in touch with Hassan, the son, when he comes."

Davis shrugged. "You've been a good friend," he answered. "But I'm not certain if the paper's where I've guessed."

Davis broke off, shuffled his bare feet on the wood floor. It was growing dark; Ah Lee, bringing in another drink for them, silently lit an oil lamp to dispel the evening shadows as night blotted out the forms of the trees outside.

When the Chinaman had left them alone again, Hanson asked quickly, "Where do you believe this paper is, then?"

There was a side door close by them. It opened suddenly, and a man stepped in. Davis looked up, startled, as did Hanson.

"What do you want?" growled Hanson.

"Just sit where you are," the newcomer ordered in French, with a thick German intonation. In his hand he held a Lüger automatic as he coolly surveyed them. He was in whites, white coat, army breeches, legs in puttees; his rounded head was topped by a solar topee.

"If you're one of de Parien's men," Davis snapped, "go ahead and shoot. You won't get anything out of me."

"De Parien?" repeated the German. "He's not here? I did not know he was in Guiana. We made sure before entering that no one watched this building. And I'm not one of his men. You're Davis, the American, are you not?"

He stepped in suddenly, seized Hanson's wrist, snapped the gun the aviator had drawn, from Hanson's clasp, and dropped it in his coat pocket, still with no sign of excitement. As Davis cursed, the Lüger came up, and he ordered:

"Still quiet, please."

ALWAYS keeping an eye on them, he backed to the side door, spoke in guttural tones. A second man stepped in. He was a magnificent creature, taller than the slim German, taller even than Davis, who stared at him with open lips. The handle of a dagger protruded from his leather belt, which also held a holstered pistol; around his black hair was a cloth band.

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His nose was curved, powerful, lips thin, drawn tight across a stern mouth. His eyes were bright as twin stars, and they held Davis, for they were the eyes of Hosem ben Ali, the dead Riff.

"Hassan!" Davis gasped. He rose, stepped forward.

"You know him, then?" the German asked.

"I knew your father, Hassan ben Hosem; he died beside me in prison. He hoped you'd come before he died."

"It was the will of Allah I should be too late," Hassan replied. He was aloof, haughty, of a different race.

"I'm Baron von Steub," the German said, bowing from the waist to Davis. "I see you're in sympathy with us. We made sure neither de Parien nor his spies watched this place before we entered. You're sure he's in Guiana? We thought him still abroad."

"He's in St. Laurent," Davis declared. "Who is he?"

"De Parien? He's Chief of the French *Service d' Intelligence*. You didn't know? We're in great danger, for the secret service would like to finish us. I heard of you, Davis, that you'd known Hosem ben Ali; that he gave you a map before he died; it is the talk of the town. You were pointed out to me, and I've watched a chance to speak to you. You'll help us, then? It's said you received from Hassan's father the information we've tried so hard to obtain, for which we've come from Morocco. It was always impossible for Caid Hosem to communicate with his son by letter, because of de Parien and his spies. I'm chief of staff of Hassan's armies, his personal aide."

Hanson's face gleamed white under the lamp. "Be careful, Davis," he warned. "Don't let them flimflam you!"

Von Steub slapped his hand to Hanson's mouth. Hassan stepped in, drawing his curved knife. They were businesslike, cool, so matter of fact Davis didn't divine their intention till almost too late.

Hassan ben Hosem had already raised the dagger.

"You can't," Davis cried, seizing the Riff's powerful wrist.

Hassan frowned, pulled loose, knife still up.

"Wait," begged von Steub. "Davis, this man may be one of de Parien's agents. De Parien's clever. Already we've disposed of two French agents who trailed us in Dutch Guiana—our plane, ready and waiting to carry us back to Venezuela, where we can in safety await a ship, is on the Kruger plantation right across the river. We're in danger of arrest, secret arrest, and we can take no chances."

"You can't kill my friend," Davis said flatly. "He's no pal of de Parien's. If you hurt him, you'll never get that map."

Von Steub turned to Hassan. "You comprehend, Caid?"

Hassan nodded.

"Hold the gun, *chef*," continued von Steub. "At least, we can tie this fellow up. Come, we have no time to waste; we came ourselves, since we could trust no one else in so vital a matter."

Hanson's fists were clenched. But he allowed them to tie him, gag him.

"You may fly with us in our amphibian," von Steub said to Davis. "There's room. Our boat's close by here, and straight across the plane waits, filled, ready to go."

Escape again was offered Davis.

"I'll need some civilian clothes," he said eagerly. "Also a spade. The Chink will sell them to us."

"Good. We'll put this man in the

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jungle a short distance," von Steub said.

He picked up Hanson, lowered him through the window and dragged him into the bush a short distance so he was hidden from the building.

Returning, he leaned on the casement, said "Come this vay. It's better we're not seen."

ST. LAURENT'S main street was lit, but by back ways they worked around the prison where the convicts were locked in for the night. The graveyard, broken by hundreds of mounds, was so crowded with the dead their bodies were laid over former graves. It was deserted at that time of night. Davis, carrying the spade, wearing a wrinkled white suit, led the way.

"Here," he said at last; "here's your father's grave, Hassan."

The Riff chieftain bowed his head. Davis set to work, throwing back the soft earth, while the two waited. He worked fast, sweat pouring off him in the hot night. The moon was rising, and the less light the better. Finally his spade struck the wood coffin containing Hosem ben Ali's remains. Waist-deep in the pit, Davis pried loose the cover.

Hassan stared down at the wasted features of his father.

"*Allah akbar,*" he murmured. "*Sultan el-islam djfer.*"

"Your father gave me the paper for you," Davis explained, looking up. "But as he passed it to me Commandant Rabat came into the barrack, tipped by his spy Jean. I suppose your father knew Rabat wanted that paper, so he snatched it back from me, and covered his face with his blanket. I was as mystified as any one else about where that paper had gone to. It wasn't till much later, when I had time to think it all over, and put myself in your father's place, that I figured out what he'd done with it. He put it in his mouth—I heard his teeth click—and tried to swallow it, died in the effort—"

Suddenly Davis, staring at the jaws of the corpse, broke off. Now, instead of the firm set, they were loose.

Hassan and von Steub were both eagerly bending over, looking down.

"It's not here," Davis said. "I—I was sure I'd guessed right, but—"

Suddenly lights blinded them, harsh orders in French came to throw up their hands.

Von Steub cursed, reached for his Lüger; he had drawn it, cocked it, before Rabat's voice bawled, "Fire!"

Davis was down in the grave; bullets ripped into von Steub, and he crashed, the Lüger exploding harmlessly as he fell.

De Parien leaped in, followed by Rabat and a dozen black soldiers. Hassan ben Hosem had no chance, but he pulled his pistol and fired; his bullet passed through de Parien's topee, struck a soldier in the mouth, killing him.

Rabat raised his Ruby, pulled the trigger again and again, sending four heavy slugs into Hassan's exposed breast. The proud Riff, preferring death to capture, fell beside his German friend.

Threateningly, de Parien covered Davis, who crouched in the grave. The American shrugged, held up his hands. Flares were lit, the graveyard brightly illuminated.

"Come out of there," ordered Rabat, and, when Davis had climbed out, he rammed the muzzle of his pistol into Davis' belly and laughed. "The fun's over, American."

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De Parien climbed down into the grave, began quickly to examine the dead man. The first place he searched was the mouth.

"Not here," he screamed.

AGAIN they roughly went through Davis' pockets and those of Hassan and von Steub, still warm with departing life.

Rabat slapped Davis. "To the blockhouse," he said furiously. "Now you'll get all you've asked for!"

"Wait," growled de Parien, eyes wild. "Wait, Rabat. I must have that paper. It should have been in the corpse's mouth. But it's not. Davis, tell me the truth, for God's sake!"

Davis shrugged. "I thought it was there, also. Since it's not—well, it's as big a mystery to me as to you."

"You see, he's useless, M'sieu' le Colonel," Rabat growled. "Let me have him."

"Not yet," de Parien snapped. "Come, bring him along."

As they left the graveyard, a figure hurried up to de Parien.

"Did you get it?" It was Hanson, Davis' friend.

As Davis realized that Hanson was with de Parien, a cold streak hit him. He gasped; he had not suspected Hanson. De Parien led them to a near-by house, went into a large room opening onto a patio filled with palms and tropical flowers.

"Wait outside, Rabat," ordered de Parien.

Hanson, face set, took a chair near by. De Parien shut the door after the commandant, turned to Davis. "I'm going to tell you the whole story, American," he said gravely. "I came here from Morocco, beat von Steub and Hassan by a day, on their trail. It isn't money I'm after, Davis, but a symbolic sword, for France, my country. I've worked for years trying to solve this mystery. I must find it, this Sacred Sword.

"It's blessed by Allah, and is said to have been carried by Mohammed. It has cost France thousands of lives, billions of francs, and will go on doing so till it's found, destroyed by us. Each time there's a Holy War this accursed Sword is at the bottom of it. Abd el-Krim, who defeated Spain and turned all the fury of his fanatics on my country, last waved it. When we finally routed him after much bloodshed and misery, his aide, Hosem ben Ali, took the Sword in an effort to save it from capture.

"Surrounded by our troops, Hosem buried it with his own hands somewhere within a mile-circle in the Mid-Atlas mountains of Morocco. He hid treasure, too, jewels and money, but it's the Sword we must have. The Mohammedans regard it as an order to war. Hassan, Hosem's son, was only a boy in 1925 when the last Riff war took place, never saw his father again after we transported Hosem here to Devil's Isle. But all Hassan needed was this Sword to bring millions of Moslems rallying to him for another Holy War.

"Forty thousand Frenchmen in Morocco against forty million Moslems! It took us three years, a nation's ransom, the lives of many men to beat Abd el-Krim. And this is the blind end of the trail I've followed, after that Sword. We had Hosem shut away on the islet where none could get to him. But when he grew sick I decided to play a dangerous game. His son had tried before to contact him through agents. Then Hassan and von Steub set out for Guiana themselves. I had Hosem

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placed in the common barrack, to make it look easy to them, sure I could intercept their messages. Rabat, the fool, claimed that stupid Jean would spy for me—I dared not show myself, since Hosem knew me. Now I'm blocked, and the Sword still exists!"

De Parien strode nervously up and down. It was plain he was very patriotic, put his country above himself. Lack of sleep had drawn his face, ringed his eyes. "Help me, Davis," he begged.

"You tried to flimflam me," the American growled. "First it was Jean, then Rabat, then yourself. For that I'd forgive you. But you bought over my one friend in the world, Hanson. He crossed me for you, de Parien."

HANSON stepped forward. "Davis, I was broke; hadn't a cent. De Parien followed you to my place, then found out I was your pal. He offered me plenty if I'd get your secret. Well, I thought that was best for both of us. De Parien was watching from the prison clock tower, with a pair of binoculars; he saw us go into Ah Lee's, but he missed Hassan and von Steub, as they entered after dark. But he came to the café, traced me to the spot where von Steub left me, and, when I told him you'd asked for a spade, guessed at once you must be on your way to the graveyard."

"Yes, I too believed then that the paper was hidden in the Riff's mouth," de Parien said. "I should have thought of it before. It was stupid of me not to. The first place such a prisoner as Hosem would think of disposing of such a paper would be his mouth, chew it up, swallow it—"

Davis suddenly uttered a cry. "I think I have it," he said.

De Parien seized his sleeve. "What? If you can find it for me, I swear on my honor to have you freed from Guiana."

"Call Rabat, then. He was alone with Hosem's body while we went for a wheelbarrow. Now I recall he acted strangely when we returned. He would have thought of the mouth, as well."

De Parien strode to the door, flung it back. "Rabat!" he called.

The Commandant came along the corridor from the street, slowly entered.

"You want me?" he asked, face expressionless.

"I want the paper you stole from between the teeth of Hosem ben Ali," de Parien snapped. "Give it to me."

There was a fierce struggle of eyes between the two Frenchmen. Then the Commandant shrugged, reached in his pocket, tossed a folded paper on the table.

"There it is,'" he said. "But it means nothing, it's senseless. I had it translated."

With a cry de Parien leaped to the table, picked up the paper. "Sura xxv. 34—x. 19.—lvii. 7—" he read aloud. Suddenly he raised his eyes, frowning. "But this is no map. It's a series of notations from the Koran, the Holy Book of Moslems."

Rabat laughed. "M'sieu' le Colonel's so clever at deciphering," he sneered. "Get a Koran, as I did, and you'll find the whole thing is senseless. The treasure—if there is one—remains hidden."

"It was more than treasure," returned de Parien sternly. "Do you think I'd come all the way from Africa, lie, steal, kill, for money?"

Davis reached in his pocket, drew out the Koran Hosem had given him. "Wait, de Parien," he cried. "The

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Caid begged me to give this book to his son along with the paper!"

De Parien snatched the Koran, looked again at the paper. Then he uttered an exclamation of joy, threw himself at the table and began writing, one word at a time. "I've got it now, Davis," he gasped. "Hosem has marked with a faint dot each word on the page designated on his paper. Without both together, either is useless. The dead Caid's message is mine—'One — hundred — paces — from the oasis of Jeka—face the Ka'ba—dig—when the shadow—of the date palm falls—'"

WITH a curse, Rabat leaped forward, snatched up the Koran and paper. "Give them to me," he snarled. "They're mine, de Parien. I had the paper first. I'm going to get that treasure, and I want credit for finding the Sword. I'm sick of this damned life in Guiana, and this will make me rich—"

De Parien, flushing, sprang to his feet.

"You stupid fool," he cried, "you can't get away with that!" His hand swept to his pocket, reaching for a gun.

Davis started in. But Rabat had a knife, the handle concealed up his uniform sleeve, the blade behind his palm. He drove it swiftly into de Parien's belly, shoving upward toward the heart.

Hanson and Davis saw the chief of secret service reel back, blood staining his white tunic.

Rabat withdrew his dagger, turned on the two.

"As for you, Davis," he said quickly, "you'll die for this. The guillotine will get you for stabbing de Parien."

"You dirty liar!" gasped Hanson.

"Shut up," Rabat ordered coolly. "I'm in absolute command here. My word will be taken above both of you, never fear, when I say Davis killed de Parien."

Outside, in the street, were Rabat's black soldiers. Between were two closed doors. Davis exchanged a swift glance with Hanson. Then, without a word, they both leaped for Rabat.

They were on him in an instant, Davis' powerful hands at his throat, choking off his cries, of which only a few short ones escaped before Davis got his grip.

The knife in Rabat's hand slashed across Davis' arm, tearing it open, but the convict paid no attention, never relaxing his hold. An instant later Hanson had hold of Rabat's right wrist, and, with a vicious jerk, had pulled it way up behind his back.

Rabat kicked, fought mutely; his eyes bulged as Davis put on the pressure, shoving him back against the wall, shaking him so his head beat into the plaster. His face grew purple, horrible choking sounds issuing from his lips.

Hanson, eyes wild, had the knife. As Davis held the Commandant in a grip of iron, Hanson began to stab him, again and again, with the dagger that had killed de Parien.

Davis' fury against his enemy, against the man who had tried to ruin him, seemed to communicate itself to Hanson, his friend. Without speaking, Hanson twisted the knife in Rabat's body until the Commandant fell, a lifeless mass, to the floor.

Breathing swiftly, they stood staring down at the body. Rabat was dead.

Hanson bent over him, searched his tunic. He drew out money, rolls of francs.

"That's waht he took from me," Davis muttered thickly.

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"Take it. Come on, we've got to get out of here," Hanson said.

Davis, arm bleeding, shook his head. "We haven't time; we'll never get away, Hanson."

"We will," Hanson replied. "They will guillotine us if we don't. Come on." He was at the window leading to the patio.

Davis glanced once around the room, then picked the Koran and the Riff's paper from the floor where they had fallen with Rabat.

Hurriedly he climbed out the window, at Hanson's heels. In the street waited Rabat's soldiers, who would arrest them for murder surely. But through the yard in the rear of the bungalow they easily reached the other avenue, hurrying along it together through the night.

The tri-motored amphibian roared through the night, Pilot Hanson following the dark line of the coast underneath. Beside him sat Davis, on his way to freedom at last.

It was Hanson who had remembered the skiff waiting at the river, left by von Steub and Hassan, who would no longer need it. A quick row had taken them to the Dutch Guiana shore, a short walk to the clearing where the plane stood, deserted save for a sleeping Negro guard. It was fueled, ready to go. They put the black out, climbed in, and the flier Hanson took off, skillfully handling the big machine.

The engines made it impossible for them to hear one another. Davis gripped the Koran and the Riff's paper in his hands. Hanson looked at him, and Davis held them up. Hanson shook his head, grinned suddenly.

Davis leaned out the window, dropped the Koran and the paper down, into the sea.

THE END

Plant Racketeers

AUSTRALIA produces a wild fig vine which is outstanding in its murderous tendencies. As a tender young shoot it leans against a big tree. A while later it becomes two shoots, both leaning. The shoots grow around the tree, multiply, finally flatten until they enclose it. Fig leaves take the place of the tree's. When the tree finally dies the fig vine consumes it. Birds eat the small purple figs, and then strop their beaks on neighboring trees, which plants new fig vines. *Delos White.*

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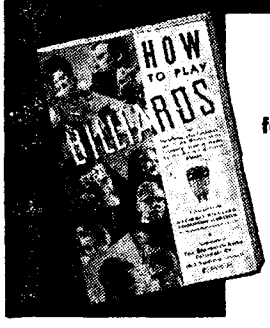

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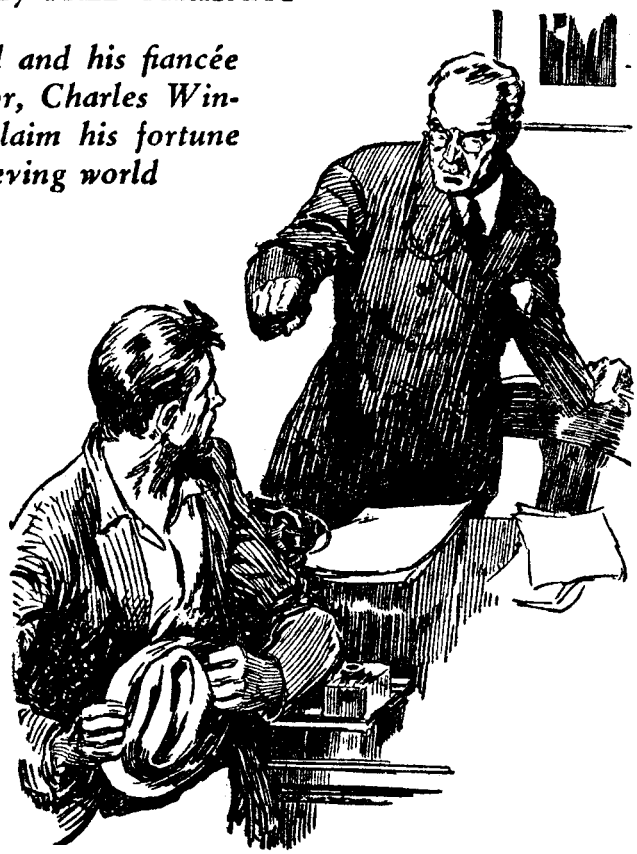
Masquerade

By FRED MacISAAC

His estate mismanaged and his fiancée married to an impostor, Charles Winthrop struggled to reclaim his fortune against a misbelieving world



"I'll give you one minute to leave this bank!"

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AFTER spending a number of years in the Foreign Legion, Charles Haydon Winthrop, scion of the Boston Winthrops, was returning home on the train from New York, when to his amazement he read in the paper of *his own marriage* having just taken place to Mrs. Sally Greenough (née Colton) of Beacon Hill. Sally had been the cause of his joining the legion, after she had jilted him for a wealthier man. In the meantime, her husband had lost his money in the Wall Street crash and committed suicide. But Winthrop wondered how she could be fooled by an impostor. Next to him in the train sat pretty Violet Putnam, also returning to Boston, after an unsuccessful attempt to break into show business. Winthrop discussed his circumstances with her and she was quite sympathetic.

But Mrs. Greenough was not being fooled! Shrewd and conniving, she had made a bargain with Steve Spencer, the impostor, when he had arrived on the scene. Steve's plan was to sign a few big checks and then to lam out of town. But Sally Greenough saw through his disguise (as Detective Mike Rafferty did not!) and she convinced him that it was to his advantage to work with her.

When the papers ran pictures of the wedding, the real Charles Winthrop was not the only surprised person. Steve's old crooked cronies noticed the resemblance and immediately sent one of the "boys" to investigate, for Steve was wanted for having squealed on one of the gang.

CHAPTER VII.

"A LOVING LADY."

THE first thing one would have seen if privileged to open the door of a small apartment in an old brownstone house on East Fifty-

This story began in the Argosy for December 22

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Fourth street would have been a pair of very lovely bare legs with pink mules decorated with blue puffs and having holes in the soles which were hanging over the high side of an old brown velvet couch.

The legs belonged to a young woman named Gladys Gorman who was lying flat on the couch, her unpillowed head adorned with a tangle of platinum hair with a brown tinge where it grew out of the scalp. There was a cigarette between the lips of the owner of head and legs which was absolutely vertical because of her position. She was shooting up clouds of smoke.

From a kitchenette came a husky contralto voice.

"You know he's taken a run-out powder. You're old enough to realize when you're ditched, ain't you?"

"Do me a favor, Jill," requested the young woman on the couch. "Open the door and bring in the morning paper."

"You lazy bum, get it yourself," retorted the unseen contralto.

There was a chuckle. "Think of my broken heart," she pleaded.

No answer. With a sigh she swung her legs down from their perch and walked gracefully across the disheveled room. She was somebody to see, that girl. Being in her early twenties, the vast quantities of drink she had consumed left few traces upon a really beautiful face. Before show business had folded up, Gladys Gorman was good for a hundred a week and all she had to do for it was to lean against a large vase on a corner of the stage or perch on a lofty staging in a tableau called "Venus Arising in her Wrath" or something like that, wearing a jeweled girdle.

She had large dark brown eyes, the color of her hair before Jean Harlow popularized platinum. Her nose was small and cute, her mouth was like a Cupid's bow and her teeth were exquisite. Tall, slender with fine long legs, she was a perfect model.

She brought in the paper and threw herself on the couch. Jill was getting breakfast. If Jill didn't get it, it wasn't got. Gladys, who was the kind of lily which sews not nor spins, certainly couldn't be expected to cook.

Gladys began to read the paper from the rear so to speak. She started at page twenty-four, looked at the radio announcements, turned to the theatrical ads, inspected advertisements of steamers sailing for far places longingly, read the columnists, ran her eye over headlines dealing with scandal, saw what shows were in town and glanced at the society pictures to see if any of the profesh who had married well were getting into newsprint.

Wars, revolutions, depression, recovery programs—well she didn't know yet what N.R.A. meant.

"What time is it, Jill?" she inquired.

"'Bout noon. You ain't going anywhere."

"Jill, answer the door, will you?"

"Go to blazes," replied the accommodating Jill.

Gladys rose wearily and crossed the room again. The door bell had rung.

She opened the door languidly and then an indignant gleam came into her beautiful brown eyes.

"Pete!" she exclaimed. "Outsky."

She made to close the door but the boot of Mr. Fultz prevented. He pushed hard and made his entrance.

"I told you I didn't know where he was. I ain't seen him. He never even called me up. I ain't dressed and you get the heck out of here."

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Mr. Fultz's big mouth split into a propitiating smile.

"Now, Baby," he pleaded. "Don't be rough with Papa."

Gladys placed her hands on her hips and thrust out her chin at him.

"And if I know where he was, I wouldn't tell you," she declared. Don't I know what you want him for? You tell Walter Wolfson that if a hair of Steve's head is harmed I'll get a gun and turn him into a pudding with lead instead of raisins."

Fultz walked by her and seated himself on her sofa. "Something smells good," he remarked. "I had my breakfast but I can always eat."

JILL showed herself for the first time. She was rather plump, rather old, and rather battered in appearance. That's why she lived with Gladys and did all the housework. It's the fate of old show girls who have to team up with young ones.

"There are two eggs and four slices of bacon," she stated, "and we're eating 'em. For your info, there's a restaurant around the corner."

"I told you to amskray," exclaimed the very hostile Gladys.

"How would you like to make a couple of centuries, Baby?" he inquired. "Judging by the layout, you girl's can use it." Gladys struck an attitude. "I wouldn't sell Steve for a million," she asserted dramatically. "A couple of centuries. You low down—"

"Business before pleasure, as Walter said when he give Steve a reprieve," remarked Pete. "Walter needs Steve, Gladys. A big job. Dada for everybody. Diamonds and fur coats for little Gladys. To hell with Lefty Edge."

"Do I look that much of a sap?" she demanded. "I told you before I don't know what become of him."

"That's right, Pete," declared Jill from the kitchenette door. "We know he had plenty buried, but he didn't even send her a finif in the mails when the last letter she wrote him told him we owed two month's rent."

"He can't keep away from you, Gladys," declared Pete. "He's lying low on account of Lefty Edge. When he gets the word that there is a hen on and also an armistice, he'll show up."

"You find him. Get out of here."

Pete who had been sitting on a newspaper drew it from under him. It was a copy of the paper which had interested Walter Wolfson and also Violet Putnam and the man who called himself Mulligan. He turned to the society page and extended it to Gladys.

"Peek at that pitcher, will you?" he requested.

While Gladys didn't like to read much she always enjoyed pictures. She gazed. She grew white. "Why the dirty—" well girls in Broadway shows pick up queer language—from the stage hands no doubt. The paper was snatched from her hand by Jill. "Strike me pink," she requested excitedly.

"Married," cried Gladys. "Oh, my Gawd."

Fultz enjoyed the sensation he had created for a full half minute.

"It ain't Steve," he said at length. "But it's certainly a lot like him. That's why we want Steve?"

"Yeah?" inquired Gladys. "Winthrop! He never told me his name was Winthrop."

"This guy is authentic, you dunker," declared Pete. "Now listen, blondie. We're going to snatch this bozo, who has millions. In comes

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Steve and takes his place. Right away he starts writing checks, big checks. It's the smartest snatch ever pulled. We don't have to use the fire on the tootsie to make Winthrop write his John Hancock. Steve does the scribbling. When we let Winthrop go, he can't buy a plate of soup. Perfect, eh?"

GLADYS nodded. She was very pale. "Smooth," she said. "Like silk."

"Well, what the hell? With a few millions to pick up, we should worry about Steve's squeal. Anyway he only talked after ten hours under the light. I might open up myself—"

"Yeah," remarked Jill. "In ten seconds, you greased pig."

"So we all make a lot of jingle," said Pete happily, "and you and Steve melt with the organ playing, 'Where Was Moses When the Lights Went Out?' Call him on the phone, now."

Gladys approached the sofa, leaned over the little man, and said, low and tense and greatly agitated, "I don't know where he is, I don't know where he is. I wish I did, but I don't. See?" Pete most reluctantly believed her. He rose slowly as Jill screeched, "My Gawd, the eggs!" and vanished.

"Tip him to the idea, Baby," Pete requested as he departed. "He'll be crawling through your window pretty soon now."

As the door closed upon him, Jill came back. She looked horror-struck. "Everything's burned to a crisp," she moaned. "Damn that Pete Fultz. What's the matter, Gladys?"

For Gladys was standing with clenched hands and blazing eyes.

"It's him," she said through her teeth. "It's Steve, the—"

"Nerts. You heard Pete. This is some Boston society codfish. He just married his girlish sweetheart after ten years in the Foreign Legion. From what I read about them Legioners, this dame is in for a hot time."

"Look," commanded Gladys who had picked up the paper while she spoke. "It's Steve. See, he has his fingers crossed."

"Where? What of it?"

"See the right hand hanging down. His first and second fingers are crossed. When Steve is excited or sad or glad or anything he crosses those fingers."

"So do a lot of other people."

"Not when they look like this Winthrop Guy. And Steve was up the River for years. This guy claims to have been in the Foreign Legion in Africa. That dumb Fultz wouldn't think of that. And Wolfson didn't. When a girl has lived with a man she knows."

"But this dame ought to know. It says she's known him all her life. Why did she marry him if it's Steve?"

"Which is what I'm finding out. I'm going to Boston."

"You can't, you have no dough."

Gladys laughed harshly. "I know a man who will give me fifty any time I ask him. If I ask him pretty."

"Gladys, you wouldn't."

"Look what Steve's done."

"It can't be Steve."

"It is. Help me dress, will yer? I'm in a hurry."

CHAPTER VIII.

"I NEVER SAW YOU BEFORE."

THE real Charles Winthrop woke late in the morning following his arrival in the city of his birth. Complete physical exhaustion had caused him to sleep the clock around.

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Hancock Street is old dingy and narrow and the windowpanes of the single window in his room hadn't been washed for ages thus. The sun, which shone brightly elsewhere, was hard put to it to brighten up the tiny chamber.

He woke, however, refreshed and hopeful. In this day and age there are many lodging houses in the West End of Boston which have no running water in the rooms. A battered old commode on which stood a washbasin and pitcher had to serve Winthrop for his ablutions. As he had been accustomed to primitive conditions for years, this did not trouble him.

He brushed his shabby clothes, removed some of the dirt from his heavy shoes with the damp towel, and sauntered forth in search of breakfast. For the small sum of fifteen cents he purchased fruit, doughnuts and coffee in a "one-arm" lunchroom on Bowdoin Square.

Dislodging the impostor had seemed a reasonably simple matter when he had taken the train at New York's Grand Central Station. When one has been born in a certain place and lived twenty-one years of his life there, he is so firmly established that ten year's absence, tan and slight facial disfigurement are not likely to prevent reëstablishing one's self.

Charles had at least a dozen friends, scores of acquaintances, college classmates and what not. A few minutes conversation, mention of incidents known only to himself and the person with whom he was talking would do the trick.

His handwriting certainly hadn't changed.

While he had no strawberry marks on his body like the long lost heirs of British fiction, he had mannerisms, tricks of speech, personalisms which his friends wouldn't have forgotten in ten years.

As he had no wicked twin brother who might impersonate him, no relatives about his own age and resembling him, the impostor must be a rank outsider who could easily be tripped. Get him in an office with Eugene Cummings, the banker and old family friend, and Charles would unmask him in a jiffy.

Of course the faker would be away for a few weeks on his honeymoon with Sally Colton. Why had she married him? Not for a minute could the impostor have deceived her. She knew he was an impostor. But Sally came of an old and respected Boston family. All Winthrop's friends knew that they had been engaged before he went abroad.

His absence had been attributed to a broken heart. Sally had jilted him and married Greenough.

He had returned, found her a widow; the old love had flamed and they had married. Romantic as hell. And people love romance. Nobody knew why he and Sally had split up. Being a gentleman Charles had confided the shameful facts to no one. Sally, of course, hated him. Sally would stand at her husband's side and lie herself black in the face.

Of course her motive was mercenary. Curious, though, because Greenough had been a millionaire and she should have been left a wealthy woman.

In the face of Sally's testimony, his closest friends would draw away from him. It was lucky she and her husband were out of the city. He would have to work fast; round up everybody and convince them before the honeymoon was over.

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The first thing to do was to call on Eugene Cummings.

EUGENE CUMMINGS was a portly, round faced, thin lipped man of fifty-five. He had snow white hair and a closely cropped white mustache. He had bushy white eyebrows, white teeth—false—and a beaming smile and a soft voice.

GLADYS GORMAN

His smile functioned and his voice did not harden when he was turning down an application for a loan. He advertised that his was a friendly bank. Courtesy was on tap, but it was a little harder to borrow money there than at less polite institutions.

Even the frozen assets in his vaults did not abridge the broadness of Mr. Cummings smile. He had an engaging manner withal, and he was a skillful public speaker. A descendant of a family which had entrée everywhere in Boston, he had on his books as depositors hundreds of the socially prominent. During the years of the absence of Charles Haydon Winthrop in parts unknown he had personally administered a small estate which legacies from rich relatives had turned into a large one.

Though Mr. Cummings had a desk in a corner of the bank and sat there in plain view when he had nothing particular to do, when there was business to be transacted he pushed open the door of a small office located behind his desk and conducted his visitor within.

Shortly before noon, Charles Haydon Winthrop entered the bank, rather to the perturbation of the special policeman. He entered briskly and confidently so the officer permitted him to pass. He stepped to the rail which cut off the president's office from the main lobby. Mr. Cummings sat at his desk, smoking a cigar and reading a contract form.

"Good morning, Mr. Cummings," the visitor called cheerfully.

The banker's head came up, the contract fell upon his desk, and the nose glasses slipped from his high bridged nose and swung like a pendulum upon the end of the broad black silk ribbon which circled his neck.

He stared at the apparition at the rail. Charles was sure he saw recognition in his blue eyes. He saw the knuckles of the man's right hand go white as he clenched the hand.

"Good morning," replied Mr. Cummings. "Come right in, please."

So that was all right, Winthrop thought and heaved a relieved sigh. Cummings knew his voice after ten years. Why should he have had any apprehension?

Smiling happily, the young man approached the desk, hand outstretched. Rising, Cummings stepped back, pushed open the door behind him and said quite formally, "In here, please."

Charles followed him into the pri-

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vate office. Cummings dropped into his chair, replaced the glasses on his nose and smiled professionally.

"What can I do for you?" he asked sharply.

"Kill the fatted calf, Mr. Cummings," replied Winthrop. "The wanderer has returned—look here, you know me, don't you?"

Cummings gazed at him coolly.

"I never saw you before in my life."

"Come now, you recognized me instantly," said Charles angrily. "You knew me the minute I spoke. Snap out of it."

The banker thrust out his under lip. "I never saw you before. Kindly state your business. I have much to do."

"So that's going to be your attitude," said Charles savagely. "Well, I don't know why you are lining up with an impostor, but you'll find out that he can't get away with it."

"If you don't state your business, I'll have you ejected from the bank," declared the banker acidly. Who are you and what do you want?"

"Charles Haydon Winthrop, at your service, Mr. Eugene Cummings."

"The Paris impostor!" exclaimed Cummings. "You have had the effrontery to come to Boston! Well, I'm going to have you arrested."

"You've known me since I was a child. You were my father's friend. Do you dare—"

"YOUNG man," the other said sternly, "I know about you. I've had ample warning, thanks to your impudent cable from Paris. Is it possible you don't know that Charles Haydon Winthrop came home a month ago and was married the day before yesterday to a young woman to whom he was engaged before he left his home ten years."

"No doubt you were at the wedding."

"Indeed I was, and so were all his old friends. You are risking imprisonment for felony, young man. I never heard of anything so impudent in my life. Why you don't even look like Charles."

"Nevertheless you recognize me instantly and you were frightened to death. Why?"

Cummings gazed at him appraisingly. "Neither in voice, face, figure nor mannerisms do you resemble Charles. As you say, I have known him since I was a child. The new Mrs. Winthrop was also intimate with him since childhood. His handwriting is as familiar to me as my own—

"Which is why you know the man Sally Colton married is a faker and why you know that I am Charles Winthrop," the visitor cried furiously.

"I am losing my temper," stated the banker. "You have papers, no doubt, means of identification."

"My papers were stolen from me. In the desert, Mr. Cummings. I am a deserter from the Foreign Legion. I have been wounded, ill, and being without money—"

"You are an impostor of incredible effrontery. I've wasted a lot of time on you. Mr. Winthrop was informed of your Paris cable and instructed me to have you placed under arrest if you showed up—"

"All right. Have me arrested."

Cummings hesitated. "You look as if you have been ill. You are in bad shape physically and, no doubt, mentally. I ought to call the police. It means a long term of imprisonment. I'm sorry for you, to tell the truth."

Winthrop laughed sardonically.

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Cummings leaned forward earnestly. "I have no doubt that you have informed yourself regarding the past of Charles Winthrop. It may be that you were in the Foreign Legion and learned much about the man you claim to be from Charles himself. That doesn't matter. You have no chance whatever, my friend. Charles, fortunately, reached Boston in time to establish his identity beyond the shadow of a doubt. My testimony and Mrs. Winthrop's alone establish him and there are scores of old friends who can support us.

"I have known of false claimants for estates but never before did I hear of one who had the brazen impudence to invade a man's home town, where he resides surrounded by people who have known him all his life."

"He is an impostor. You know damn well he is!"

The banker pushed back his chair and rose. "I give you one minute to get out of this bank. Otherwise I'll call in our policeman and order him to conduct you to the station and prefer charges against you. Take your choice."

Winthrop shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, betrayer of trust," he said sorrowfully. "I'll go. You and this faker won't get away with it. What have you been doing? Stealing my money?"

With a growl of rage, Cummings pressed a button on his desk.

As he rang the buzzer, Winthrop pulled open the door and walked hastily out of the bank.

It wouldn't do to be arrested. While he didn't think that Cummings would dare to turn him over to the police, he couldn't take the chance. He had to be free to build up his case. It was going to be far more difficult than he had supposed when he left the lodging house that morning.

When the door of the private office closed behind him, Eugene Cummings sank slowly into his chair, placed his elbows on his desk and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, my God!" he murmured pitifully. When the door opened and the special policeman entered he lifted a white, strained countenance and stared at him stupidly.

"What do you want?" he mumbled.

"You rang my buzzer, Mr. Cummings."

"It was an accident. Get out."

The policeman closed the door softly and went back to his post.

CHAPTER IX.

FRANÇOIS SEES A GHOST.

WINTHROP sat on a bench on Boston Common. He was in a cold rage and his fury was not directed against the impostor and the faithless Sally Colton, but against Eugene Cummings, the dishonest trustee. Robbed, not only of his money but of what was far more important to a young man bred in the traditions of Boston, his birthright.

Cummings, who had been a close friend of his father, had conspired with the others. Cummings, the pillar of rectitude, the churchman, the eminent citizen! Whatever happened to the others, Cummings should go to jail.

It was the noon hour and from thousands of shops and offices poured tens of thousands of workers released from the treadmill long enough to take enough nourishment to enable them to return and work longer. They crowded Tremont and Boylston Street and

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overflowed upon the fifty acre park in the center of the city which makes Boston unique.

Pretty girls, chattering gaily, walked rapidly along its asphalt paths on their way to cafés in the basement of old houses on Beacon Hill where one could get a six course lunch for thirty-five cents. Young business men strolled more leisurely toward the great new hotels on Park Square and Arlington Street.

A bum sat down on the bench beside Winthrop, edged over and said in a whining voice, "Got a match, buddy?"

"No."

"Well, I'd smoke a cigarette if I had a match and a cigarette," insinuated the hobo.

Winthrop rose and moved to an empty bench while the tramp looked after him, swearing softly.

Time passed. Winthrop could not decide upon his next move. Or course he must look up old friends, one by one, tell them his story and obtain their support. A broken nose, a scar and a deep African tan hadn't changed him beyond recognition. Cummings had recognized him instantly.

And then his eyes became fixed upon a young man approaching on the path. A dapper young man, swinging a cane —Boston men as a rule do not carry canes and when they do, never swing them.

He strode along swiftly. He was whistling. He was blond, tall and rather handsome. His name was Frederick Holmes and he had been a classmate of Winthrop in college. Charles laughed joyfully.

Holmes and he had been in a few scrapes together. In his college days he had been known as "Ham" Holmes because he had been eager to act in every society show.

He rose and bore down on him.

"Hello, Ham," he exclaimed. "You haven't changed a bit. Are you a Thespian nowadays?"

Mr. Holmes stopped and stared in astonishment and annoyance. He hadn't been called "Ham" for years. He didn't like it. And he resented being addressed familiarly by seedy strangers.

HE gazed at Winthrop through pale, blue myopic eyes.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded. "How do you get this way?"

"'Ham,' I'm Charlie Winthrop. You mean to say you've forgotten me?"

Holmes's eyes sparkled with anger.

"Why, you damned liar," he exclaimed. "I went to Charlie Winthrop's wedding, a couple of days ago. I never saw you before. You don't know me and, if you don't stop pestering me, I'll call an officer."

"Ham," pleaded Winthrop. "Don't you remember the two girls in the 1923 Follies—the time we hired the hansom cab—"

"How the hell do you know—Charlie and I had a talk about that. What's your game, anyway?"

"I'm Charlie Winthrop. This man is a fake, Ham."

"Why you— I'll notify the authorities. Posing as Charlie Winthrop—you're nothing but a broken down prize fighter. Scram or I'll call that cop over there," he blustered.

Winthrop despondently turned away.

With some indecision, Holmes gazed after him. He really ought to give the fellow in charge. A skinny, broken-nosed tramp passing himself off as Charles Haydon Winthrop.

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Anyway he'd notify Winthrop as soon as he and Sally came back from their honeymoon. How the devil did the brute know about the chorus girl scandal? Shucks, it had been in the papers at the time. Sure. He and Charlie had had a laugh about it the other day at the wedding.

He resumed his walk. Winthrop found an empty bench and sat down again. He felt tired and weak and utterly despondent.

"Ham," of course, was a fool. If the impostor had spoken of the scrape back in 1923, it was because Sally had tipped him to it. Sally had known about it at the time. Sally was going to be his chief obstacle. Running round together for several years she knew everything he had done in his youth, knew all his friends. Standing beside the faker, she could keep him out of difficulty.

Sally, married to the impostor, Cummings, who must have a big financial interest in the success of the impersonation; these two might keep him out of his name and inheritance. He must proceed carefully. On their evidence, alone, any Massachusetts Judge would send him to the penitentiary for years.

He sat humped on the bench, deep in thought, and he didn't see the approach of a small alien with beady black eyes, a dark skin and simian features, nor did the other observe the figure on the bench until he was a dozen feet away from it. He glanced, he stared, he drew in his breath sharply.

"Sacred name of a God," he muttered in the French tongue. He sped by, watching obliquely. The man on the bench did not look up. A few yards away he turned off the path and, circling back, approached the bench from the rear. His olive skin was the color of slate gray and under his breath he repeated the most horrible maledictions mingled with formulas learned as a boy in a French village and calculated to lay the ghosts of departed souls.

Francois Garun, ex-Legionnaire, was seeing things; he was seeing a man who had been dying and whom he had abandoned in the African desert, whom he had robbed and left without water or food. This apparition had crossed deserts, continents and oceans and was sitting on a bench on Boston Common and his presence spelled ruin to a great business enterprise.

WHEN Charles finally rose from the bench and moved toward Boylston Street he had a shadow. Charles had had an inspiration. He was going to call on his dentist.

There is no more certain means of identification than dentistry and a dentist would put this impostor where he belonged. Since childhood, Dr. Bernard Wendell had cared for the teeth of Charles Haydon Winthrop. He had a chart of the young man's mouth. He had put fillings in three of Charles' back teeth and built a one tooth bridge when, playing on the Harvard scrub, Charles had had a front tooth knocked out. The bridge was still in position and Dr. Wendell would not fail to recognize his own work.

Besides that, the fillings were still in the three back teeth. Wendell had a record of when he put them in and their position was marked on the chart.

Charles was positively gay as he hastened along, oblivious of the sinister shadow. Despite Sally and Cummings, the impersonation would be

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short-lived. He was almost sorry for Sally who had married the faker for money and who would see her husband go to jail and the money restored to its rightful owner. Sally perhaps would go to jail as an accessory. No, she would claim she had been deceived.

Four dental jobs on a mouthful of teeth. The chances were a million to one that the impostor had not been able to duplicate these fillings. The dentist's angle had never occurred to the conspirators. How could it?

Good old Dr. Wendell! There was one man who would know Charles Haydon. He would know him if he were a mutilated and putrified corpse. By the teeth.

He entered the lobby of the office building and said almost automatically "Seventh Floor," to the elevator attendant. At the Seventh he turned right and stopped at number 742. On the ground glass door panel was another name. "Dr. Arthur Doolittle."

Had he made a mistake? He toured the floor. Well, Dr. Wendell had moved. He entered the office of Dr. Doolittle. A pimply young man wearing a white jacket came forward to receive him.

"I'm looking for Dr. Wendell," he said eagerly.

"You won't find him. He's been dead for eight or nine years."

This was a horrible blow but he rallied. There was still the chart which bore his own name.

"Somebody is conducting his business, I presume," he inquired.

"Oh, yes, Dr. Peabody. He's on the sixth floor. Number 615. If you wish dental work, if you have an aching tooth. I—er—"

"No, thanks. I'm looking for information."

He descended to the sixth floor and entered room 615 where a pale spectacled young man came forth when he asked the office girl for Dr. Peabody.

"I understand you are carrying on Dr. Wendell's business," Charles remarked.

"Yes. I'm his nephew. I may say with pardonable pride that I have retained all my uncle's clientele. He was old and I am a Harvard Dental man of recent graduation and up-to-date."

CHARLES breathed more freely.

"Well then," he said brightly. "You have his files of course. He has a chart of my teeth—"

"Oh, certainly. Come into my office."

He approached a filing cabinet.

"Your name, please."

"Charles H. Winthrop.

"Yes, yes. A relative of Charles Winthrop who was married the other day."

Winthrop nodded.

"When was your last visit?"

"Let's see. I think it was 1921."

The dentist's face fell. "Its most unfortunate," he stated. "As the files were full to overflowing, I went through them about a year ago and destroyed all charts more than ten years old with the exception of those of active patients."

"You may have overlooked it," said Charles whose emotion may be conjectured. "Please make a search. It's most important."

"Oh, certainly. But if you havn't called for twelve years—"

He was running through the "W's." He shook his head.

"Sorry. It has been destroyed."

"It seems to me that Dr. Wendell also set down the work he did in ledgers."

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"I know he did. A double system of checks and quite unnecessary in a business of this kind. I burned all the old ledgers."

"You certainly are very up-to-date," said Winthrop bitterly. Dr. Peabody smiled complacently. "One must be to keep up with the modern trend. My uncle was the best man of his day but he was totally unaware of scientific discoveries. For example, he went ahead killing the nerves in teeth, ignorant of the fact that he was dooming his patients to rheumatism, arthritis, neuritis and other ailments."

"No chance you might have that chart at your home."

"I told you that everything more than ten years old was destroyed," said the doctor a bit impatiently. "However, I'm familiar with his methods. A glance at your teeth and I'll make a new chart."

"Good morning," replied Winthrop gruffly.

For the time being, Winthrop was a beaten man. The fever still in his bones made itself felt, his heart was like a stone and the feet which carried him to his lodgings were made of lead. He looked neither to right nor left nor behind and he did not see François Garun who trailed him to his door. When he had entered Garun carefully noted the street number, after which he hastened to Mount Vernon Street and put in a telephone call.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN CROOK MEETS CROOK.

THERE is no more beautiful harbor on the American continent than that of Boston. It is a wide expanse of smooth water dotted with hundreds of islands, some of considerable size, upon which are prisons and workhouses; others smaller and the summer residences of Back Bay people, while still others are occupied by obsolete forts with rusty Civil War cannon and high stone parapets to inform an enemy exactly where to aim his high-powered guns.

Almost all of these islands are beautiful; deep dark patches of grass and trees, whose residents commute to the city in speedy motor cruisers and reside safe from beggars and peddlers and other pests of city or resort dwellers.

There is one particular island which houses a beautiful mansion, with spacious cultivated grounds, which was for some years the home of a celebrated American actress who married a millionaire and retired from the stage.

In former days, Sally Greenough and her husband had visited the happy couple on this particular island and retained a delightful recollection of it. Knowing that it was for rent or for sale because of the divorce of the actress and the subsequent financial debacle of her husband, she had suggested it as an ideal place for a honeymoon.

"Anywhere else we might go," she told Steve Sampson," we are sure to run into people who knew Charles Winthrop. I need three or four weeks to coach you. You made one or two slips at the wedding breakfast but they were overlooked because you were supposed to be in a condition of blissful delirium."

"Right," the bridegroom had agreed. He had taken a terrible chance in permitting photographs to be made of the happy pair and he had shuddered when he saw the display the newspapers had made of them.

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If the impostor had known how the New York papers had gone for the romantic wedding of the Boston society man who had escaped from the Foreign Legion and the girl who had been more or less true to him for a decade he would have shuddered still more. Nobody knew better than he how long was the arm of Walter Wolfson and that something was coming to him for squealing on Lefty Edge.

It was because of Walter Wolfson that he had left New York in a box car. Sometimes, at night, he woke with a start from a dream of falling into the hands of the avenger.

As for Gladys Gorman, he had had to keep away from her because Wolfson would expect him to visit her immediately upon his release from prison. Anyway, Gladys belonged to the past and that was a closed book—he hoped.

He had a beautiful wife and a talented confederate. Since Cummings had informed him of the cable for money from somebody in Paris claiming to be Charles Haydon Winthrop, he had been uneasy, though he and Garun had concocted a cablegram to the French Military Intelligence which they hoped would cause the deserter to be clapped into a French prison for ten or fifteen years.

It was perfectly obvious, now, to Steve, that he could not have put over this impersonation without the help of Sally Greenough. During the weeks preceding the wedding she hardly ever had left his side. She had carried him successfully through a dozen tense situations and, by marrying him, she had made it difficult for the fellow in Paris to knock him off his perch. In the face of Sally's identification, the rightful Winthrop wouldn't have the ghost of a chance.

But he was a bit afraid of Sally. Though Steve was a crook with a killing or two to his credit, Sally had a degree of unscrupulousness that appalled him. And she was hard as nails, clever as sin, and ready to go to any length to get what she wanted, which was principally money.

On the other hand she was beautiful and had no intention of making this a marriage in name only.

Steve, by one of those curious freaks of nature, bore a striking resemblance to a man whom she had loved in her youth as much as she could love anybody. Steve had a dash and élan which appealed to her. If she had known of his prison record, of his nefarious connections in New York, of the probability that his past would rise up to confound him, she would not have taken the fatal step of marrying him but she would have blackmailed him for as much as the traffic would bear, and left him to stand or fall on his own ingenuity. If she hadn't accepted without question the assurances of François Garun that he had left Charles dead on the desert, she would not have married the impostor.

WHILE Sally was a woman who would sell her soul for money, who had committed no crimes simply because of fear of being found out, she was without knowledge of the world outside Boston and had the conventional notions about criminals.

Because Steve was handsome, well mannered, suave and amusing, she assumed that he was a gentleman plunging for the first time into criminal intrigue.

Like millions of other people, Sally supposed that a crook had the stamp of dishonesty on his face.

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The way she looked at it, she had acquired a husband who pleased her in certain important respects and whom, because of her knowledge of his crime, she could keep under her thumb.

Having considered the situation from all the angles which occurred to her, she was sure, if in some fantastic manner the masquerader was unmasked, she could escape punishment by insisting that she, like his other friends, was an innocent victim. Already a score of former acquaintances had shaken his hand and accepted him as the man he claimed to be. She was just another dupe.

As for Steve, he had no illusions regarding the loyalty of his loving wife. If Sally had had any principles, she would not have joined him in defrauding the rightful heirs of Charles Winthrop of five million dollars. And, if things got hot, she would turn on him like a snake which she resembled in other important respects.

When the cable came from Paris, Steve had abandoned hope of getting away with the entire fortune of the man he was impersonating. What he had to do was to collect all he could as rapidly as possible and vanish from the scene of his endeavors. And he wasn't going to take Sally with him, nor was he going to leave any more money in her hands than was absolutely necessary.

So far he had had advances of only thirty or forty thousand dollars, half of which Sally had immediately impounded and the rest of which had gone for wedding expenses, rentals, wardrobe and what not.

Early in the afternoon of the day on which the real Charles Winthrop went forth to establish his identity with lamentable results, Steve entered the Pilgrim Bank of Boston to sign papers relating to the transfer of his estate from the hands of his trustee to his own.

Cummings had explained that it would take a month to make the arrangements. Under the circumstances, Sally had joyfully permitted her husband to leave her alone on the island for a few hours. Steve was in a state of excitement and jubilation which may be imagined.

President Cummings saw him enter the bank, rose, met him at the rail, shook hands cordially, and invited him into the president's office.

"You are on time to the minute," he remarked.

"It's a big day, Mr. Cummings," he said complacently.

CUMMINGS folded his hands on the edge of his desk and gazed at him enigmatically. "Naturally. It isn't every day that a man comes into possession of a fortune."

"Five million dollars," declared Steve with sparkling eyes.

"Ahem, you must understand that in the present state of the market it is impossible to unload such a large sum in securities without taking a terrific loss. I suggest that we wait a while—"

"Oh, sure. Just turn the securities over to me. I'll ooze them out gradually. I expect to take some loss, of course."

"I have a proposition to make to you, Mr. Winthrop. When you went abroad you appointed me your administrator, giving me full authority to manage the estate in your absence. Since that time you have inherited two sizable fortunes which I have invested and guarded as carefully as possible during bad times."

"And have been well paid for it. I've no complaint to make."

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"I have charged the usual fee, naturally. Now my suggestion is that you renew the power of attorney. I shall continue to pay your income, which, because many of the securities are not paying dividends at present, is about a hundred fifty thousand a year. I'll pay you, let us say, fifteen thousand a month.

"You have had advances of thirty thousand which we shall deduct at the end of the year."

"What's the idea?" demanded Steve truculently. "You hand over my estate, Mr. Cummings. That's what I'm here for. I don't need an administrator. I'm not going to let you dribble out a miserable fifteen thousand a month."

"While I am thoroughly convinced that you are Charles Haydon Winthrop," replied Cummings coolly, "there is another person who claims to be Charles Haydon Winthrop. You see my position."

Steve jumped to his feet and leaned over the desk in menacing manner.

"I'm on to you, you old chisler," he exclaimed. "You're taking advantage of that cable from Paris. I'm no boy to be handed a lot of bull from a banker. You turn over my dough."

Cummings shook his head firmly. "The person who cabled from Paris is in Boston," he stated. "He called on me this morning. He may make trouble. What's the matter, Mr. Winthrop?"

For Steve had grown grey and his eyes had a frightened glare in them.

"Nothing. Not a thing," he muttered. "I don't give a damn if he is in Boston. He's a fake."

"No doubt, no doubt. However, if he finds an unscrupulous lawyer he can create difficulties. You realize my position."

Steve pulled himself together and resumed his chair.

"You're taking advantage of an absurd claim to hold onto my money," he charged.

"Should the courts decide in this man's favor, I should be accused of criminal negligence in turning the Winthrop fortune over to the first comer. In fact, I have no legal right to give you a penny, with a possibility of litigation."

The crafty Mr. Cummings had done a lot of thinking after the first shock of the apparition of the real Charles Winthrop. He could see his own advantage farther than most men and he had excellent reasons for wishing to postpone a settlement of his Winthrop trust.

On the other hand he was confronting an individual known in the New York underworld as Slippery Steve for excellent reasons. Steve gazed at the suave, smooth banker and recognized a brother-in-arms.

"I appreciate your position," he said softly. "You are taking a chance to pay me this monthly income."

"Being certain of the outcome of a trial, I am willing to take that chance," declared Cummings eagerly. Steve chuckled.

"Just how great is this shrinkage?" he demanded.

"Why I haven't the figures—"

"PLENTY, no doubt. In fact, Mr. Cummings, you've considered my fortune as your own. You never expected to have to make a settlement. It looked to you as though you might have control of principal and interest for ten or fifteen years, until my death was finally established. You could hold off assumption of death for a long time, eh."

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"In view of the circumstances, sir, I don't like your manner," said Cummings indignantly.

"Come through with what's left," said Steve roughly. "It's your best chance. I'm set. Nobody can dislodge me. My marriage—"

"You have received the best proposition I can make. Accept it and I'll support you. With my support you are impregnable."

"Nothing doing. I want my money."

Cummings sighed. He rose, went to the door, looked out and beckoned to a secretary.

"I am in an important conference, Miss Smith," he stated. "Under no circumstances permit anybody to approach my office."

Closing the door he returned to his seat and gazed sternly at his visitor.

"The man who called on me this morning," he said, "was, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Charles Haydon Winthrop. Who in hell are you, or don't you care to tell?"

He smiled grimly as he saw the impostor wilt.

"Do you wish to accept my proposition?" he asked silkily.

Steve rallied amazingly. His color came back and he said something softly under his breath.

"What was that?" demanded Cummings sharply.

"An old song, 'Downy Jailbirds of a Feather,'" retorted Steve. "So you identified this fellow. Well, why not call the cops?"

He saw Cummings hesitate. He laughed gratingly.

"I'll tell you why. Because you've helped yourself plenty to the Winthrop fortune. You're caught cold, if you recognize this fellow, but you think you can do business with me. Well, we can do business but not on your terms."

"I hesitate because your marriage to Sally Greenough will make it very difficult for Charles to dislodge you. I deny categorically—"

"Save your breath. How much are you short?"

"Due to certain circumstances, a million and a half," confessed Cummings.

"O.K. I'll be reasonable. I'll split the balance three ways—a third to you, a third to Sally, a third to me. Sally's in of course."

Cummings wrung his hands. "But Winthrop—he has many friends, it's possible despite our attitude—litigation will force an audit—"

"You leave Winthrop to me," commanded Steve Spencer. "I'll guarantee that he won't bother us."

"How—" he met the gleam in the other man's eye. "Don't tell me," he faltered.

"There won't be any litigation," Steve said grimly.

"If I could be sure of that."

"We'll postpone settlement for a month. Give me a check for fifty thousand this minute. When the coast is clear we'll sit down and split the estate in a nice friendly way. What could be sweeter?"

"What is to protect me?" demanded the banker. "With this—er—person out of the way, you can demand a settlement in full."

"I don't want trouble with you. You'll have to accept my assurance. Otherwise—"

"Nothing doing," declared Cummings firmly. "I want a signed agreement from you that you, wishing to reimburse me beyond ordinary fees for my management of your estate, agree to pay me thirty-three and a third per

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cent of three and a half million dollars. Otherwise I refuse to turn over the estate until the courts have decided who is the real owner of it."

"Do I get an advance of fifty thousand dollars?"

"Yes," agreed Cummings.

"Write your agreement. I'll sign it."

With a trembling hand Cummings wrote the agreement which Steve signed in a perfect imitation of Winthrop's handwriting.

Cummings pressed a buzzer and ordered a cashier's check which he signed. He was shaking as if he had ague. When a man has trod the paths of rectitude for half a century and only strayed because the economic system had collapsed and caught him napping, it is a grievous thing to find himself in alliance with a criminal and paying money for the removal of a man who, if he menaced the safety of the banker, was the son of a very old friend.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLET MEETS A BRIDE.

VIOLET PUTNAM stood on the Boston Yacht Club landing. Resting beside her on the float was her suitcase. One would have had to know her to recognize her. On the train from New York she had been plainly dressed but chic. Now, by the seedy ill-fitting dress, by the slope of her shoulders, the angle at which she hung her head, by the absence of make-up, the straightness of her yellow hair and the most unbecoming hat, only one accustomed to peer beneath the surface of things would have given her a second glance.

A motor boat entered the slip and chugged its way up to the float. A uniformed boatman jumped heavily upon the planking, saw the slight despondent form and waved a hand to it.

"You're for Lambert's Island?" he inquired. "Hop aboard, Miss."

Violet picked up her battered suitcase—the boatman made no move to relieve her of it—and stepped into the neat, shiny, little speed boat.

The boatman cast off the line, took the wheel and headed out to sea. As his back was toward the girl in the stern of the boat, she permitted herself the luxury of a few tears.

Things had been horrible at home. Her stepfather had been out of work for months. Her mother was in a condition of nervous irritability and the welcome that the returned wanderer had received was chilly to put it mildly.

Mrs. Averill, who was a blonde, haggard, bitter, thoroughly disillusioned and completely unhappy woman had greeted her as though she felt injured that her daughter should descend upon her.

"You don't look well," she said drearily. "Oh, yes, there's a place for you to sleep, but we'll be put out into the street almost any day now. We're three months behind in our rent and the landlord is being nasty about it."

"I'll try not to be a burden, mother. I'll get a job. Any kind of a job. Where is Mr. Averill?"

"Don't ask me. He hasn't had anything to do for a long time and it's a week since he has had a dollar to give me. But he gets money for drink somehow. I wish I was dead."

So Violet had tried to comfort her mother. They had dined on tea, bread and cheese and gone early to bed. At seven A.M. Violet rolled out of the bed in the spare room of the flat and brought in the morning paper which

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had been thrust in the empty milk bottle outside the door.

This happened to be the morning when the milk man had obeyed instructions and failed to call at the Averill's door.

Violet read the want ads. Situations for women were pitifully scarce except for domestic help. It appeared that there were still people who had to have servants.

"Lady's Maid. Must know how to dress hair, mend, manicure, etc., and not object to living in seclusion. Apply before ten o'clock at 777 Tremont Street, Room 43."

Violet thrust out her little jaw. "I'll be a lady's maid if they'll have me," she declared. And seclusion appeals to me. I've got to get out of here immediately. Let's see. They'll want references."

She dressed speedily, went out to a stationer's and bought herself three or four expensive envelopes and sheets of paper, different samples of female note paper. When she returned — the Averills were still asleep—she wrote herself enthusiastic recommendations and signed four different names and New York addresses. In the circumstances in which she found herself, she saw no need of having scruples. And she thought it unlikely that the references would be investigated.

AT eight-thirty, as soon as the door of office 43 was opened, Violet entered along with the thirty oddly assorted women of the servant type. The place was an intelligence office, nothing more. A hard faced woman sat behind a desk taking names and addresses. A second hard faced woman came to the door of a private office and gave the assembled multitude a professional scrutiny. It was a sorry looking lot; miserable, down-at-the-heels femininity which included black, tan and white. Unwashed, most of them; undernourished, many of them; desperate a number of them. Only those who professed to be cooks had flesh on their bones.

The woman at the door of the inner office stuck out a long bony finger which pointed directly at Violet.

"You thin girl there, come in here," she commanded.

"You're a ladies maid," she said with no special perspicacity since Violet, a young actress of parts, was made up for lady's maid.

Violet nodded.

"Lemme see yer references," she demanded. Violet grew tense as the woman ran her eye over the four missives. Would she recognize the same handwriting despite the author's effort to achieve four different styles of penmanship?

"You must be swell to hear them tell it," was her comment. "What did they all fire you for?"

For that the girl had an answer. "The depression. Mrs. Gregg's husband lost all his money in Wall Street. Mrs. Smith—"

"Oh, sure. This note says you talk French."

"Yes, I do."

The Intelligence Office manager cackled. "You can't prove it by me," she said complacently. And what good does it do anybody to talk them foreign lingoes? Well, you look clean and neat and I guess you're the best of the lot out there. My terms are ten per cent a week for the first ten weeks. This is a good job, if you suit. Seventy-five a month and you're working for a young bride."

"Then you are giving me the position?" asked Violet eagerly.

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"I'm going to send you down to let Mrs. Winthrop have a look at you. You be on the Boston Yacht Club landing at noon and a boat will come for you. What's your name? I know we got it outside, but what is it?"

"Mary Morton," lied Violet Putnam.

The woman filled in a card and handed it to her. "That's all," she said, "except a five dollar fee that you got to pay in advance whether you suit or not. Thanks. It's a relief not to have you hand me the old stall. Here, I'm going to write a line to Mrs. Winthrop that you're the best bet I've seen for a long time. That ought to clinch things for you."

"Thank you very much Miss—er—"

"Miss Keefe, dearie," the woman informed her with a beaming smile.

"You're the type we're always trying to find but don't very often. I bet you go over big with Mrs. Winthrop. You look sensible and you won't mind living on this island. In a month they're coming back to town. It's their honeymoon you know."

"Oh, is this Mrs. Charles Haydon Winthrop?" asked Violet excitedly.

"Sure. The one that married the millionaire who was a French soldier. It was all over the papers yesterday. Awful romantic."

Violet nodded. "I do hope I'll suit," she said earnestly.

"If you're half as good as these dames claim you are you'll be O.K. Good morning, dearie. Thanks for the finif."

"And I'll send you half my wages, mother," said Violet as she was leaving the apartment a couple of hours later.

Mrs. Averill wiped her streaming eyes. "It's a godsend and I'll see that Herbert don't lay a finger on a penny of it. But I hate to think of my own daughter going out to service."

"It'll be a lark," the girl declared brightly. "And as soon as the show business comes to life, I'll ditch it."

"I'm awfully glad you thought to give an assumed name, Violet."

"Pride is the last thing one loses, I suppose," the girl said with a sigh.

YESTERDAY morning she had read the wedding announcement of the Winthrops without dreaming that she was ever going to come into contact with them. And she had referred to it again under such curious circumsances. The poor, bitter, ill, half-crazed boy in the train who had been in the Foreign Legion, had claimed that he was Charles Haydon Winthrop and immediately denied it and said his name was Mulligan, which was ridiculous.

He had not given her an address, and she understood why. He had none. She had given him her mother's street number and telephone number. Perhaps he would get in touch.

She would have liked to call him. If he called her from now on she wouldn't be home. She might never see him again. While there was no reason why it should matter, it did, nevertheless.

There was something very sweet and attractive about that boy. Something which appealed to what Violet thought was her maternal instinct. She would like to know what he was doing, how he was getting along.

"Mother," she said, "If a Mr.—er—Mulligan calls, tell him that I am out of town, but if he will write me care of you, you will forward the letter."

"Mulligan? Who is he? Why should you be corresponding with a man named Mulligan?"

He happens to be a very charming

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cultured person. It's an ugly name but he can't help that."

"I suppose not. Now Averill is a fine name but what good does it do me? All right, dear, I'll tell him."

Violet opened her purse. She had fifteen dollars to her name but the woman in the employment office was sure she would land this job. So she gave her mother ten of the fifteen dollars. Mrs. Putnam protested, wept and finally accepted it gratefully. And now Violet was skimming over the waters of Boston Harbor and rapidly approaching a bright green island, thickly wooded. Through the trees she could catch glimpses of a big white house.

The sun was shining on Boston harbor, the breeze was balmy, and her spirits, which had been low, began to rise again.

There had been a foreign star in whose company she had played a very small part. One day this woman, being in an expansive mood had remarked:

"Violet, you American girls think that you can read a part and play it well. To play a part you must have lived it. To portray suffering you must have suffered. You'll never amount to anything until you have lived a dozen lives."

WELL, perhaps, she would be able to play a lady's maid after she had worked for Mrs. Winthrop. She might learn things in this household which would qualify her to succeed on the stage. And, as Mary Morton, nobody would ever know that she had been a servant. Seventy-five a month with board and lodgings was good pay in these days, even for a young actress. Maybe things were not going to be so bad. She would have a glimpse of married happiness, something which she had never seen in her own home. Her mother had been unhappy in both her marriages.

Just the same she winced when the boatman led her out of the path to the front door and around to the rear entrance.

An English butler met her in the pantry and asked her a few sharp questions, but Violet turned on her smile, and was pleased to see him melt under its warmth.

"I'll ask the Madame if she wishes to talk with you now, Morton," he said. "I hired an excellent lady's maid myself but when Mrs. Winthrop saw her she sent her away immediately. That's how there happens to be a vacancy."

"Mrs. Winthrop will see you," said the butler, returning after leaving the girl in the pantry for five minutes. "Come with me, please."

He led the way to the second floor of the establishment. Violet noted that the carpeting was Oriental, that the furniture was costly, but that the effect of the house was heavy. The boudoir of Mrs. Winthrop was rather oppressive, and, in Violet's opinion, in bad taste. However, it was a rented house so not an expression of Mrs. Winthrop's personality.

Violet did not know that it had been furnished to suit a member of her own profession who had married rich a decade or two back.

As she was looking about her at the massive pieces in the room, Mrs. Winthrop entered from her bedroom. She wore a house robe of red velvet which heightened the Oriental effect of her. Violet felt a pair of great, mysterious black eyes on her; gazed at a handsome but rather sullen countenance and smiled propitiatingly. There was no answering smile.

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To Violet, filled with stage notions, Mrs. Winthrop seemed to fit the rôle of adventuress rather than heroine, of mistress rather than timid bride. She had to admire Mrs. Winthrop, but it seemed to her that there was an aura of wickedness about her, and being a Bostonian herself and a member of an ancient if decayed family, she felt that this woman ought not to be bearing such a typically Yankee name as Winthrop.

Inside of her, hostility expanded. She almost hoped that she wouldn't get the job.

Mrs. Winthrop sank luxuriously into a chair, and reached for and lighted a cigarette. She crossed her knees which caused the houserobe to fall back and reveal a pair of very fine legs up to the thighs. She did not ask Violet to sit down, and looked at her coldly.

"So you're the new maid," she said in her deep tones. "You don't look strong."

"I can't move pianos," Violet answered tartly, "but I can perform the normal duties of a lady's maid."

"Slightly temperamental," sneered Sally. "Well, if you can do what I require, I'm satisfied. I understand you speak French."

"*Oui madame.*"

"I'll talk to you in French then. To improve my own accent. We are going abroad shortly. I think we shall live abroad. I hate Boston and its people. They oppress me. You are familiar with hairdressing?"

"Yes, Mrs. Winthrop." During a previous lull in show business, Violet had spent several months in a hairdressing establishment on Fifth Avenue.

"That's good. I don't think I shall go up to town during the next month. I understand your references are all right. Let me see them."

VIOLET waited while she ran over them. "I never heard of any of these people," drawled Mrs. Winthrop. "Oh, well, I'll give you a trial. You may go and tell Atwood to find you quarters. Have you a uniform?"

Violet winced. "No," she said forlornly.

"Well, the housekeeper will fix you up." The phone was ringing. Mrs. Winthrop picked it up.

"Oh, hello, Charles," she said eagerly. "Everything settled? Well, why not talk over the telephone. Why won't you be home tonight? Look here, if you can't talk over the phone and you can't come down, I'll go to town. Yes. At the apartment on Mount Vernon Street. All right. At four o'clock."

She hung up. Her eyes, Violet thought, were positively smoking.

She glanced at the maid as though she had forgotten her, but she speedily remembered.

"I have to go to town in a hurry. Go into my bathroom and draw my bath. Not too hot. Put the Swanson bath salts in it. This way."

She led the way into a vast chamber, pulling off her clothes as she moved. The lounging dress dropped on the floor and she stood forth in a scanty slip on.

"Well, don't stand mooning there. Go into the bathroom," she snapped.

Violet hastened to draw the water and to pour in the salts. By that time Sally, nude as Eve, stood beside her, impatient. She tested the water with a toe, and then stepped in.

"Can I do anything, Madame?" asked Violet anxiously.

"Go out and pick up my things and hang them up. Get down my black

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crêpe street dress, the one with silver trimmings. I won't have time to do more than brush my hair."

As she lolled in the tub she volleyed instructions which the girl followed with commendable success. Finally there was nothing to do except to await the lady's pleasure and Violet gazed around the chamber with natural feminine curiosity. It was overdone, like the boudoir, but its expensiveness was beyond question.

AND then her eyes came into contact with a pair of eyes in a large photograph in a silver frame which stood upon the bride's dresser. Violet gave a start of astonishment because, for a second, she thought she was looking into the eyes of the man in the train.

He was a handsome youth, however, with thick light hair and fine straight features and round cheeks. Very different from the broken-nosed physical wreck who had fallen asleep on her shoulder. But was it?

She stepped close to the photograph, gazed at it intently and its resemblance to the young man on the train grew. Younger, of course. It was evidently an old photograph. Stillman, its maker, whose name was stamped on the bottom of it, had been out of business for years. Being a Bostonian herself, she knew that.

Now Violet had not noticed a resemblance between the man in the newspaper picture and the feverish youth who said that he was Charles Haydon Winthrop and had immediately denied it. But there certainly was a strong resemblance here. The original of the photograph would look like Mr. Mulligan if he were ten years older and had lost thirty pounds and had had his nose broken and in addition had had a scar on his cheek.

It was very curious. This, of course, was a picture of Mr. Winthrop, the husband of the beautiful woman in the tub.

"How many times have I got to call you?" demanded Sally angrily.

"I beg your pardon, madam."

Sally hastened into the bedroom.

"Help me out, you fool," snapped Mrs. Winthrop. "Now rub me dry. Not so hard, you idiot. Do you think I want to be sandpapered?"

Violet swallowed hard and suppressed a defiant answer. And she kept her temper admirably during the quarter of an hour before the bride was ready to leave the house. Sally, who had been without the services of a maid for a long time, thoroughly enjoyed ordering this one around.

After she had gone Violet set the chamber in order and went downstairs to the pantry where she found the butler.

"Well?" he demanded eagerly. "How did you get along?"

"All right, I think. Mrs. Winthrop told me to ask you for quarters."

"Splendid. I may say that I am pleased that you have given satisfaction. I'm sure our association will be a pleasant one."

Violet was not so sure. The fifty-year-old Englishman positively was ogling her. Resisting an impulse to slap his face she picked up the suitcase which she had left in the pantry. He leaped to relieve her of it and preceded her to the third floor where he installed her in a small plainly furnished room.

"Since Madam has gone to town, you may rest until she returns and sends for you," he said pompously.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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The Emperor's face remained a stern mask

The Emperor's Agent

By ARED WHITE

Directed by Napoleon, this daring spy rode straight into the enemy's headquarters to discover that—

THE diminutive figure sprawled across a large map on the floor of an Austrian peasant's hut suggested a drummer boy or company mascot. His head was cupped in his hands, his eyes fixed dreamily on the crackling fireplace. At a table near by, immobile as wax figures, sat two officers at a game of chess. Although they were very young men, their aiguillettes and epaulettes bespoke high rank; one a marshal of France, the other an Emperor's aide-de-camp of the rank of general.

As the little man stirred and got slowly from the floor to his feet, the two high officers leaped erect and stood attentively in front of him.

"I find I'm not satisfied with the excellent information we have of the Russian intention," said the little man in a mildly caustic voice. "I can feel it in my bones there's some damnable mischief afoot in Austria—and the Czar hasn't any intention of signing an armistice."

"But, Your Majesty," Marshal Berthier argued promptly, "Czar Alexander would hardly send his aide-de-camp to Prince Murat's outposts if his

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mood was not conciliatory. Likewise, the observations of General Savary at Olmütz to-day confirm the Russian purpose of peace, as do all the reports of our spies."

"May I be permitted to suggest, Sire," the Emperor's aide put in anxiously, "that you need a sound night's sleep. Your Majesty has been riding positions since daybreak, using up three relays of horses, and have had only a few snatches of sleep in the past fortnight."

Napoleon gave an annoyed snap of his fingers and set to pacing the narrow dirt floor, his hands clasped tightly behind him. He halted presently in front of his chief of staff and aide.

"No matter what information we have, I feel something brewing," he announced decisively. "What's more, I'm going to find out what is going on back in the Russian lines. I've heard all the arguments that the Czar will not risk his whole army to help Austria, after the whipping we've given the Austrian Emperor. Well, *messieurs*, Vienna may lie behind us and Austria rest in the palm of our hand. But with ninety thousand Russians and Austrians massed back of Austerlitz, I've got an idea they're going to need another lesson before they yield!"

"Sire, I will send General Savary to the Czar again to-morrow on some pretext of the negotiations," Berthier argued patiently. "He will be able to confirm his previous observations of their troop dispositions."

"Useless!" snapped Napoleon. "The Russians are too expert in the art of deceit to let our emissaries see anything."

"Your Majesty's judgment is unsurpassed!" General Junot interposed tactfully. "If you are of the same idea after a restful night's sleep—"

"Sleep, ninny, is not necessary to remind me that the Czar's commanders reckon situations in terms of battalions!" the Emperor of the French broke in. "They know as well as we do that they now hold the advantage by a dozen full battalions over us. Therefore they'll be clamoring for the Czar's consent to trick us. I'll sleep when this Russian riddle satisfies me—and not before."

"Then, Sire," Berthier proposed, "shall I send out spies to the outposts to listen?"

Napoleon jerked his head in negation. "Send at once for Captain de Guyreaux," he commanded. "I'll have his men cover the Austrian outposts until daybreak and see if he can get any news."

Berthier cast a quick glance at General Junot. The aide-de-camp shifted from one foot to the other.

"I regret, Sire, that it is useless to send for De Guyreaux at the present moment. De Guyreaux is drunk, Your Majesty."

"*Diable!*" swore Bonaparte. "Then have a surgeon sober him up as quickly as possible and report him to me in person!"

"I regret to report, Sire," Junot reported, "that De Guyreaux is also confined to his quarters in arrest by order of the provost marshal at Brunn. A disgraceful brawl at the inn an hour ago in which your captain fought Captain l'Engers of Prince Murat's dragoons."

Bonaparte gave a vindictive scowl and struck one hand sharply with the other.

"Drunk—in arrest!" he raged. "An officer of my Guard drunk when I need him—and baiting Murat's ugly dragoons at a public inn! Why was this not reported to me instantly?"

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"I felt Your Majesty had other things to think of," Berthier placated. "Colonel Brouillot, of the Prince's staff, is preparing formal charges against De Guyreaux and will present them here when they are ready. I intended to have the court order for Your Majesty's approval."

"A NASTY mess," Bonaparte complained. "Murat always has had his nose in the air over the Emperor's Guard, and this will warm him like wine. Bring that rascal De Guyreaux here even if he's so drunk you have to carry him!"

"Sire, in the morning he will be sober, and—" Berthier started to argue.

"I said to bring him here!" Napoleon repeated.

General Junot stepped out into the crisp November night and snapped an order to a junior officer of the Guard. In an incredibly short time there was a rap at the door and De Guyreaux was reported into the Emperor's presence. But the offender, erect and immaculate in the undress uniform of the Emperor's Guard, strode across the hut, halted in front of his commander, brought his heels lightly together and saluted.

Bonaparte sat scowling at the captain for several moments. But the Emperor's searching eyes did not disturb the young officer's poise, his perfect self-possession. His clear gray eyes were free of strain or concern, his fine, even features composed as he waited in respectful silence.

"De Guyreaux," the Emperor spoke up sharply, "I am informed you are drunk."

"Your Majesty must see that I am entirely sober," De Guyreaux replied quietly.

"How long do you claim to have been sober, captain?"

"At least since I received an order that Your Majesty commanded my presence."

"Hum, a pretty speech," Bonaparte muttered. "But will you deny that you chose a pretty time to get messed up at an Austrian inn—earlier this evening?"

"Some cases of champagne came up from Vienna to-day in a pontoon wagon, Sire. Four of us of the Emperor's Guard who were not immediately on duty went to the inn at Brunn to celebrate our Emperor's recent victories, the first chance to do so we have had since coming to Austerlitz from Vienna."

"And you complicated matters," Bonaparte said sharply, "by getting yourself in a duel with one of Prince Murat's dragoons!"

"Sire, there was no duel. An officer of the Prince's cavalry forced his presence on us at the inn with the obnoxious claim that Murat's horse does all the fighting, leaving only the burial of Austrian dead to the rest of us."

"You refer to Captain l'Engers?"

"I—pardon, Sire—I do not exactly recall the name."

"So, you choose to shield the rascal, eh? Well, were the boasts of a cobbler's son cause for a gentleman of the Imperial Guard to draw his steel in a public inn? *Vivedieu!* Did the Count de Guyreaux teach you such manners? Or is that the practice in Virginia?"

De Guyreaux's lips tightened at this taunt with its subtle implication of his American mother.

"I gave the Prince's officer a lesson, Sire," he rejoined evenly, "only when it was forced upon me. I paid no attention to his insulting conduct, not even when he went so far as to say

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the Emperor's Guards are mere official chambermaids who should be uniformed in skirts—and that I am kept only to amuse my Emperor at an occasional game of chess. He said he should be wearing the Legion of Honor for his gallantry at Ulm, and I should be—"

"Whereupon, you demonstrated your own gallantry by attacking him, eh?"

"Sire, I ignored him; but that only fed his fury. Finally he drew and struck me across the back with the flat of his saber. That was too much, Sire. I gave him a handsome lesson by forcing his clumsy blade out of his hand with a single sortie. Then I picked up his blade and broke it across my knee. Nothing might have come of it except that a colonel of the Prince's staff came in at that moment, flew into a rage and ordered me in arrest. Those are the full facts, Sire."

THE Emperor's face remained a stern mask as he briefly weighed De Guyreaux's story.

"That, at least, is your version, Captain," he said curtly. "We shall hear the other side when Murat's best staff men have helped l'Engers prepare charges and specifications against you. In any event, it's an unfortunate mess—and will only add fuel to the feeling against my Guard. You needn't expect any sympathy from me, captain!"

"Certainly not, Your Majesty."

"What makes it doubly unfortunate for you is that I had a mission for you to-night. One of some importance. You may report back to your quarters, De Guyreaux!"

Instead of turning on his heel with a salute at the dismissal, De Guyreaux met the Emperor's eyes and held his position.

"If there was a mission, Sire, may I report myself ready and fit for duty?" he inquired.

"What, when you are in arrest for such tantrums!"

"I was sent to my quarters by the provost marshal, Sire. So far, I have seen neither charges nor specifications, nor have I received any formal order of arrest from my competent superiors of the Guard."

"You can depend upon it," Napoleon rejoined with a sour smile, "that Murat's dragoons will lose no time in supplying all that."

"Of course, Sire. But in the meantime, am I not within my rights in reporting myself for any duty required by my commander-in-chief?"

Bonaparte leaned slowly back in his chair and folded his arms tightly across his breast. His eyes drifted past De Guyreaux's face to the wall behind him. For the better part of a minute he sat in deep absorption, then straightened in his chair in sudden decision.

"I had intended merely to send you with your men to listen among the Austrian outposts, De Guyreaux," he said. "But there is a better plan for getting what I want to know if you dare risk it! Your affair with L'Engers suggests that perhaps you have not had risks enough in action of late, eh?"

A gleam of eagerness leaped into De Guyreaux's gray eyes. He half smiled. "I am at Your Majesty's command," he replied.

"I warn you that it is an exceedingly desperate enterprise," Bonaparte cautioned severely. "I would not want to reckon the chances of success."

"Your Majesty makes the assignment seem most attractive," De Guyreaux rejoined eagerly.

Bonaparte rose from his chair, went

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to a map and studied it closely for several minutes, then resumed his seat. "I needn't tell you, captain," he said in a crisp, official voice, "that the Russian Czar is at Olmütz with the Austrian Emperor and their staffs, and that they have a combined army of ninety thousand men. Nor that they have suggested an armistice with us. But do they really mean to sign an armistice? Or are they playing for time to strike at me in front of Austerlitz when they have their battalions maneuvered in readiness?"

Bonaparte folded his arms again and looked intently at the young officer. "Captain, I must have the answer to those questions at any cost! I can almost suspect a design against my right flank to cut me off from Vienna. That is their logical move if I allow them time for maneuver. Now it's prompt suicide for you to go to Olmütz. But eight kilometers back of Austerlitz is the field headquarters of Grand Duke Constantine, who, with Lichtenstein, the Austrian commander, will understand fully what is in the air. By working into Austrian territory tonight you might conceivably be able to penetrate through the wooded district to Constantine's château. At least there is a bare chance. I do not ask you to take that chance."

De Guyreaux drew himself erect and saluted.

"Sire, does Your Majesty have any further instructions?" he inquired in a level, matter-of-fact voice.

BONAPARTE went to a portmanteau for a parchment, which he examined critically and handed to De Guyreaux. "Here is an excellent forgery of the type of pass used by the Austrians in sending their agents to our lines to discuss a possible armistice," he informed. "We also have available a supply of Austrian staff uniforms from which you may make a choice. But I will not, of course, attempt to instruct you how you shall proceed."

As De Guyreaux saluted again in final understanding and acceptance, the Emperor added an admonition. "Nor do I promise you, captain, or give you the slightest reason to believe that even your complete success will in any sense mitigate your unfortunate conduct earlier this evening. I've had annoyance enough over brawls in my ranks!"

"Of course, Sire, I understand fully," said De Guyreaux.

A shadow, huddled in an overcoat of the Emperor's Guard, followed close to De Guyreaux as he strode to his quarters. The captain lighted a candle and looked anxiously at his watch, which gave the hour of ten o'clock, and turned to the man who followed him.

"Tonto, you will saddle my bay hunter," he directed. "Use Austrian saddle and accouterment, except that I wish my own horse-pistols at the cantle. Equip yourself in the same manner, put on your Austrian tirailleur uniform, be sure to select a dark bay mount for yourself, and be ready as quickly as you know how. We'll ride as soon as you report to me."

The shadow was a small man with a bony, unemotional face whose only response to the order was a quick, vindictive gleam of dolorous black eyes as he turned noiselessly to do his bidding. De Guyreaux studied his map for a time, running out roads and trails at the point of his finger, then changed to the uniform of an Austrian aide-de-camp. His lips curled as he surveyed himself in his gaudy trappings and contemplated the use to which he would put his masquerade.

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When his orderly, Tonto, returned with the mounts, De Guyreaux checked his equipment, carefully examined the set and order of his two pairs of horse-pistols, and rode off at a walk toward Murat's cavalry pickets in front of Austerlitz. Once before, in Italy, he had gone to Austrian headquarters for information of the enemy intentions. That time he had crawled upon the sentries with Tonto, seized one by the throat while Tonto disposed of him, bluffed other sentries by dint of blunt orders into repeating the password, and finally secured by stealth what he had gone for.

That coup had given Bonaparte his vital victory at Lodi.

BUT to-night De Guyreaux fixed no such plan in his mind. For one thing, time would permit no unnecessary delays. Another factor in shaping his course was De Guyreaux's growing contempt of Austrian military craftsmanship, his own mounting audacity out of Bonaparte's methods of treating the enemy.

And the Emperor's humor to-night, the affronts that had been heaped upon the Emperor's Guard, filled his veins with a hot determination to risk all in an attempt to win success in the briefest time possible. Would that not be a rebuke of Murat's uncouth cavalryman, one that would strip even a court martial of its sharpest sting?

As his mount found its legs in the cold November night, De Guyreaux moved into a canter. On reaching the French outpost line he identified himself to a junior officer of Murat's light cavalry patrol.

"But, *monsieur,* the Austrians are everywhere on the *qui vive* with their double lines of pickets—and their outposts not five hundred meters distant!" the officer cautioned. "*Oui,* the Austrian cordon is so tight there's no chance of slipping through, even in disguise!"

"We shall see as to that," De Guyreaux replied quietly. "Please remember, it was said at Ulm there were too many Austrians for our Emperor!"

With this rebuke he set his course at a cautious walk diagonally across the Austrian front, riding with straining ears until a heavy Austrian voice rang out in challenge. Then he drew his cantle pistols and, guiding his horse with his knees, charged at the voice, emptying his pistols and yelling imprecations. Musketry flared all about him, and an excited yelling of orders.

Dashing through the first resistance, Tonto clinging to his heels, De Guyreaux drew his horse on its haunches, wheeled about and rode slowly back into the commotion. Figures, mounted and afoot, hussars, dragoons, mounted chasseurs, capered excitedly in the dim starlight.

"Fools, what is all this commotion?" he bellowed to them in Austrian.

"A French regiment is attacking us!" an excited voice reported back. "We have repulsed their first blow, but they will be back!"

"It was only a French patrol stumbled on your pickets," De Guyreaux roared. "They've ridden back. Lunatics, why did you let them escape that way?"

A mounted figure rode up to him from the front. He caught the trappings of an enemy hussar officer.

"Who are you?" the officer challenged.

"Captain De Guyreaux of the Imperial Headquarters staff," he snapped back, though giving an Austrian accent to his name. "What sort of discipline

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do you maintain that there is such commotion over nothing?"

"A troop of French horse attacked my picket," the officer explained. "My men did no more firing than necessary to drive them back."

De Guyreaux made no reply, but sat his horse as if in critical observation of events, an unseen grin of deviltry on his lips. The Austrian officer turned back to his picket. Groups of men from the supports dashed up, ready for trouble, and at hearing the French cavalry had been repulsed, turned back with muttered oaths toward their bivouacs. De Guyreaux joined this rearward exodus, riding at a walk close behind a half-troop of Austrian carbineers. Their presence diverted suspicion, and he hoped that if they were challenged he might pick up the password. But shortly these Austrian horsemen turned into a thicket and dismounted. He rode on, depending upon his wits to get past the reserves and barriers without the magic word of free circulation behind the lines.

A challenge from a sentry of the musketeers brought him to a halt.

"What are your orders, sentry?" De Guyreaux demanded with all the sharp authority of an Austrian subaltern.

"To stop all passers for the counter-sign," said the musketeer.

"What password is it you demand?"

"My orders are that I am not to speak that word, but require it to be spoken into my ear by any one who is permitted to pass my post."

There was a stubborn timbre in the voice that De Guyreaux estimated promptly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now see to it that you follow your orders to the letter. There are some Frenchmen trying to force these lines to-night! Carelessness by a sentry might be very serious!"

He turned back, smiling to himself at the frankness in which he dealt with the Austrian geese. Austrian command stupidity. That was the weakness with which his Emperor always reckoned. The Austrian generals still clung to their massed ranks, their stolid discipline with its cat o' nine tails for tarnished buckles, and its blunt insistence upon blind obedience. Soldiers of such leaders could only be stuffed geese in gaudy uniforms, a fine show for their Emperor at reviews but without resource in the presence of the enemy. He had no doubt that he would make his way through. It was a matter of finding the right sentry, which would not require many trials. He would soon find one whose wits would fail under the stress of Austrian authority.

BY a detour he struck the reserve line a second time. At the challenge he repeated his demand. When the musketeer stammered, De Guyreaux leaped from his horse and strode forward.

"But how do I know you would recognize the password if I gave it to you?" he demanded.

"I am to pass only when the word is given me," the soldier faltered.

"Do you recognize a superior officer or must you have a taste of discipline for your stubbornness!" De Guyreaux pressed, suggestively fanning his boots with riding whip. "Whisper the word to me—so that I may know whether you know your business."

"Austerlitz," yielded the sentry.

"But you told me your orders were not to repeat that word," De Guyreaux crackled. "You are a disgrace to the

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service for such conduct! Now see that you do not make this mistake again if I pass this way!"

De Guyreaux turned back toward the front, to make doubly sure that he left no trail behind him since there was the risk that the sentry might report his lapse to his sergeant, or that he might not have given the true password. Retracing his course, he came upon the sentry who had turned him back. At the word "Austerlitz" the sentry stood aside and saluted with his musket. De Guyreaux proceeded now at a canter along the road leading south and east from Austerlitz.

With a good road under his horse's hoofs, his prompting was to ride at the full gallop. But locating the Grand Duke's headquarters by starlight in strange country from map-routes whose lines he must remember was a feat calling for alert observation, if not later Austrian assistance.

The number of challenges that greeted him convinced De Guyreaux he was on the right road. And when, after half an hour's travel, he was halted by a platoon of fusiliers at a road junction for the display of his orders, he guessed that the Grand Duke's headquarters must lie close at hand. When the forged orders given him by the Emperor passed unquestioned Austrian inspection, he made curt demand for a guide.

An obligingly detailed guide rode ahead of him on the main road for a thousand meters, then turned sharply to the left on a winding road that passed through a forest of small pines. At sight of lights in a broad clearing, De Guyreaux dismissed the soldier and slowed down to an even walk. The lights were in an upper story, with only a faint glow below, which fed De Guyreaux's hope that the Grand Duke and Austrian staff had retired to quarters for sleep, cards, or wine, according to their inclinations.

He rode directly toward the place, knowing that any skulking or holding back might incite suspicion among the battalion of sentries that must patrol all approaches. Only a man who moved openly and with certainty of purpose could expect to escape undue suspicion. When the place was within a hundred meters he put his horse into a canter, rode straight up to the building and dismounted, giving his reins to Tonto.

A sentry at the entrance challenged in a low voice but stepped stiffly aside at the password. De Guyreaux walked with decision in every motion to the door and entered. If there was a conference of staff officers, or any one of authority on duty in the Grand Duke's military headquarters, he knew he might face a critical situation. As for the danger of it he held no thought. With his horse at the door and a brace of pistols at his belt he felt himself as secure as if he had been at Brunn. But he meant violence and flight only as a last desperate resort. Of far more importance was the information he had come to get for his Emperor.

The entrance was into a small reception chamber that led into an immense room, brightly lighted by myriad candle clusters in silver and crystal candelabra. De Guyreaux saw that the place was a luxurious baroque villa, doubtless the best the country offered to the Grand Duke and the pampered coxcombs of his own and the Austrian staff in their operations against the audacious Emperor of the French. A Cossack stood in the entrance chamber, and though he did not challenge, his presence prompted De Guyreaux to march, without pause, into the lighted

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room, estimating the situation that confronted him as he entered.

TWO Austrian sentries stood leaning on muskets, one at each side of the room. In the center of the room was a broad walnut table covered with a large map, and with several files of papers arranged in order at one side. De Guyreaux determined his course instantly. Walking with authoritative ease to the table, he sat down and, looking severely at the sentries, ordered them to wait in the reception chamber until he sent for them. When the two hesitated, he quickened their decision with a few sharp words.

A few glances gave him the situation on the Austrian map of Austerlitz. An allied force of fifty thousand men—Russians, Croats and Austrians—was massing slowly on the French right. He seized the files of orders and searched through them. At coming to one of several pages that bore the Imperial coat of arms of Czar Alexander his heart leaped joyously. Here must be the general scheme of battle.

He sketched through it avidly. The French right must be crushed and Napoleon cut off from Vienna, his communications broken and the French destroyed. Bonaparte's own suspicions of just such a purpose flashed into De Guyreaux's mind. But this confirmation was priceless.

He laughed half aloud at the Allied audacity. Stripped of their secrecy, of any hope of surprise, the immense masses of Russians and Austrians would be no match for Napoleon's tactical genius.

He laughed again at another phase. The French must not suspect that the Allies wanted time for maneuver. Offers of an armistice, reports that the Russians would evacuate Germany, must be fed the French geese. Otherwise, Napoleon might slip away before superior force and escape his inevitable destruction.

De Guyreaux's concentration was broken by a voice. Even as he looked up he wondered that he had not sensed the presence of some one in the room. A man of middle age in dressing gown and slippers stood in front of him. He saw the man's eyes glared resentment of his impudence rather than direct suspicion.

"Who are you and what are you doing at my papers?" the other demanded.

De Guyreaux leaped to his feet, removed his cap and bowed contritely, while his quick wits reckoned his dangerous predicament. Instinctively he knew that he must face some important member of the Austrian staff, perhaps the chief of staff himself, drawn to his papers by some uncanny intuition.

"My general sent me for some papers," he said. "I did not wish to disturb—"

"You dared enter the Grand Duke's quarters unannounced and search through my secret papers!" the Austrian roared in a burst of rage. "I will have you in arrest. I'll have you—Here, where are those sentries! Of all the damnable incompetence! I'll have those sentries flogged for leaving their post without my sanction!"

De Guyreaux knew that flight through the entrance chamber, into which he had sent the sentinels, was now impossible, since the man in the dressing gown would come bellowing at his heels. He seized his one alternative. Taking up a bottle of red ink, he leaped upon the other, smeared the fluid over his face and, as the sentries came rushing in, seized the momentary

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advantage left by the Austrian's roaring rage.

"Seize that ruffian—a spy I have caught here!" he roared at the sentries as they dashed in.

If the face of the Grand Duke's Austrian counsellor was known to the sentries, identification must have been delayed by the smear of red over nose, cheeks and forehead. Also the Austrian had been stripped of reason by the outrage upon his person. He began roaring orders at the sentries, but De Guyreaux had gained their attention first. And in the confusion the Frenchman had edged away.

"I'll bring the officer of the guard!" he yelled and bolted into the entrance chamber. "Where's the officer of the guard?" he yelled again to the Cossack at the door.

EMERGING into the darkness, De Guyreaux walked coolly to his horse, took the reins from Tonto, vaulted into the saddle and rode off at a canter. Whatever confusion he had left behind at the Grand Duke's headquarters was quickly straightened out. Before he had covered a hundred meters he heard an irate calling of orders and three musket shots of alarm. Putting his horse into a lively gallop he threaded the winding black road back to the guarded highway.

The detonations of an Austrian cannon sounded the alarm from headquarters. Another cannon was fired shortly and then a battery salvo as the Grand Duke's artillery took up the alarm. De Guyreaux intended bolting through the barrier that guarded the last approach to the Grand Duke's villa. But the clatter of hoofs put a line of bayonets in front of him. He reined in his horse.

"Out of the way!" he shouted. "I am riding with important information to my Emperor!"

But the Austrian commander held his ground, insisted on checking De Guyreaux's orders again even though he had done so only half an hour before. In the distance behind him, as he waited for the return of the forgery from under the Austrian's dark-lantern, De Guyreaux caught the distinct clatter of hoofs. Constantine's headquarters had lost no time in launching a pursuit.

"Come, do you not know the meaning of that cannon?" he shouted at the outpost commander. "It means that the French are trying to escape. Out of my way—I carry important orders to my Emperor, lieutenant! A cheer—long live the Emperor!"

There was in De Guyreaux's voice, as his mount pranced against the wall of bayonets, an infection of deviltry that swept the outpost commander's decision. If the alarm of cannon had puzzled him, this impatient horseman had given the reason. A guttural bark and the bayonets were withdrawn.

"Long live the Emperor!" De Guyreaux cried as he plunged through the breach.

His horse swept ahead at the full gallop amid a scattering response to his cheer. De Guyreaux laughed aloud as he pounded ahead on the open road. A close call, that. The pursuit had not been many meters behind when he finally forced that outpost, but now he would leave them far behind. Also, Tonto would be unable to stand the pace set by his bay hunter, which was equal in speed to any mount in the French cavalry.

But he knew Tonto did not have to depend upon the speed of a horse in such a country. Tonto would slip into the woods and make his own way

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through, to the sorrow of Austrian sentries who chanced to cross his trail.

De Guyreaux knew now that there was nothing to stop him until he reached the line of outposts. He needed only to shout the password to transient sentries along the road. Each time he passed a sentry he shouted back, with a touch of deviltry, "Out of my way—the French are escaping!"

BY the time he had covered five kilometers he drew rein to listen. Sound of the pursuit was dim in the distance. The cannon at the Grand Duke's villa continued to bark an alarm in single shots of half-minute intervals. Doubtless that would stir the outpost to unusual alertness. As he turned off the road into the trails that led to the Austrian pickets he reined in to a canter again. There was danger of a fall in such terrain. There was danger, too, of a random fire into the darkness if the suspicions of the pickets were aroused.

With success so close at hand he decided upon caution. But the commotion of pursuit quickly grew into a danger that allowed of no delay. The Austrian horsemen, instead of staying by the main road, had detached a force toward the outpost along the identical route De Guyreaux followed. Moreover, they were riding hard, regardless of dangerous footing, and began firing and shouting as they came.

A final audacity leaped into De Guyreaux's brain. He set his own horse to a full trot. Challenges multiplied, but yielded him the way at his shouted password. In the starlight he made out the bearings he had taken of some jagged trees, dashed across them and called out for the commander of the picket. The commotion behind was growing. The alarm had reached the support positions. But this only served his own purpose if he acted quickly.

"How many horses do you have mounted under your command?" he shouted to the picket commander.

"Forty at this point!" the Austrian officer reported.

"The French are escaping—do you not hear the alarm behind us?" he cried. "Assemble your men and ride hard behind me to secure some prisoners for the Emperor!"

The Austrian barked his orders, his men dashed into column of sixes.

"Long live the Emperor!" De Guyreaux called, the blade of his saber flashing from its scabbard in the starlight as he led off. "Ride hard behind me—in close column!"

Murat's cavalry, wheeling a hundred men of their pickets into position to hold the Austrian cavalry attack until squadrons could rush up from the supports, heard the amazing voice shouting in French above the beating of Austrian hoofs:

"A French officer—De Guyreaux of the Emperor's Guard — riding through with prisoners!"

A French officer identified De Guyreaux's voice before the suspicious French opened fire. A moment later the galloping horsemen loomed up in the night with a momentum that carried them flush into the French pickets.

"There's your prisoners!" yelled the foremost rider, reining his mount to its haunches to seize the man immediately behind and drag him from his horse. "Here's their officer dismounted for you—seize the others!"

With that brief instant of delay, De Guyreaux galloped off to the rear, laughing gleefully at the scattering shots that told of a futile Austrian resistance on the line of French pickets.

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There was a light in the little hut that housed the Emperor of the French in front of Austerlitz. De Guyreaux, leaping from his horse, went quietly inside.

THE little man in the private's uniform was sprawled over a map on the floor, his chin cupped in his hands, staring at the map contours. Junot, at the chess table, was sleeping softly. Marshal Berthier, his large, unshapely head lolling to one side, snored sonorously opposite Junot.

The Emperor looked up and, at seeing De Guyreaux, rose expectantly.

"Sire, I have to report the result of my visit to the headquarters of the Grand Duke Constantine," De Guyreaux reported in a modulated voice, holding his salute until the Emperor remembered to acknowledge it. "If Your Majesty so desires, I will point out on the map precisely the plans of the Czar of Russia and Austrian Emperor."

In a terse, unhurried voice he exposed the projected threat against the French right flank, a blow designed to cut Napoleon off from Vienna, destroy the French communications and overwhelm the grand army by superior force and unexpected maneuver.

Bonaparte scowled over the map for many minutes, running his fingers back and forth across its markings as he asked many questions, erasing some symbols and jotting down new ones in charcoal as De Guyreaux disclosed the enemy plans. Finally the Emperor of the French leaped to his feet, his blue-gray eyes flashing an indescribable sort of joyous fury.

"Ho, but I'll play into their hands as soon as day breaks!" he exulted. "*Sacrébleu,* but I'll yield them even the fine ground of the Heights of Pratzen for their design! That will give them the courage to dream of great success. And when they hit my right, I'll mass through their center for a decision that will make Austerlitz a place in history! *Diable,* but when these geese gabble again about an armistice they'll be flopping about in earnest!"

Bonaparte emphasized his boast with a whack of his hand on the table that brought Marshal Berthier from his sleep with a start. General Junot woke at the same moment, blinked owlishly for a moment at the Emperor, and De Guyreaux, in an effort to orient himself, then rose and took from the table a scroll of papers.

"Sire, Colonel Brouillot was here an hour ago with the charges against Captain de Guyreaux," he announced dutifully.

The Emperor's smile faded, his face became grimly serious. "Yes, I must not forget the matter of Murat's cavalrymen," he said disagreeably, beating a tattoo on the table with his fingers while his forbidding humor mounted. He snapped out a sudden order: "Here, Junot, my compliments to Prince Murat as soon as it is daylight. Tell him I want a squadron of Brouillot's horse here at ten o'clock."

The Emperor's eyes sparkled with a sudden mischievous amusement as he turned to level them upon De Guyreaux, the while he went on speaking to his aide.

"Also, I want Brouillot to come personally with his squadron—which I wish temporarily placed in command of Captain l'Engers. They will put on the ceremony for Captain de Guyreaux, who is to receive from me the Legion of Honor with all appropriateness of ceremony.

THE END

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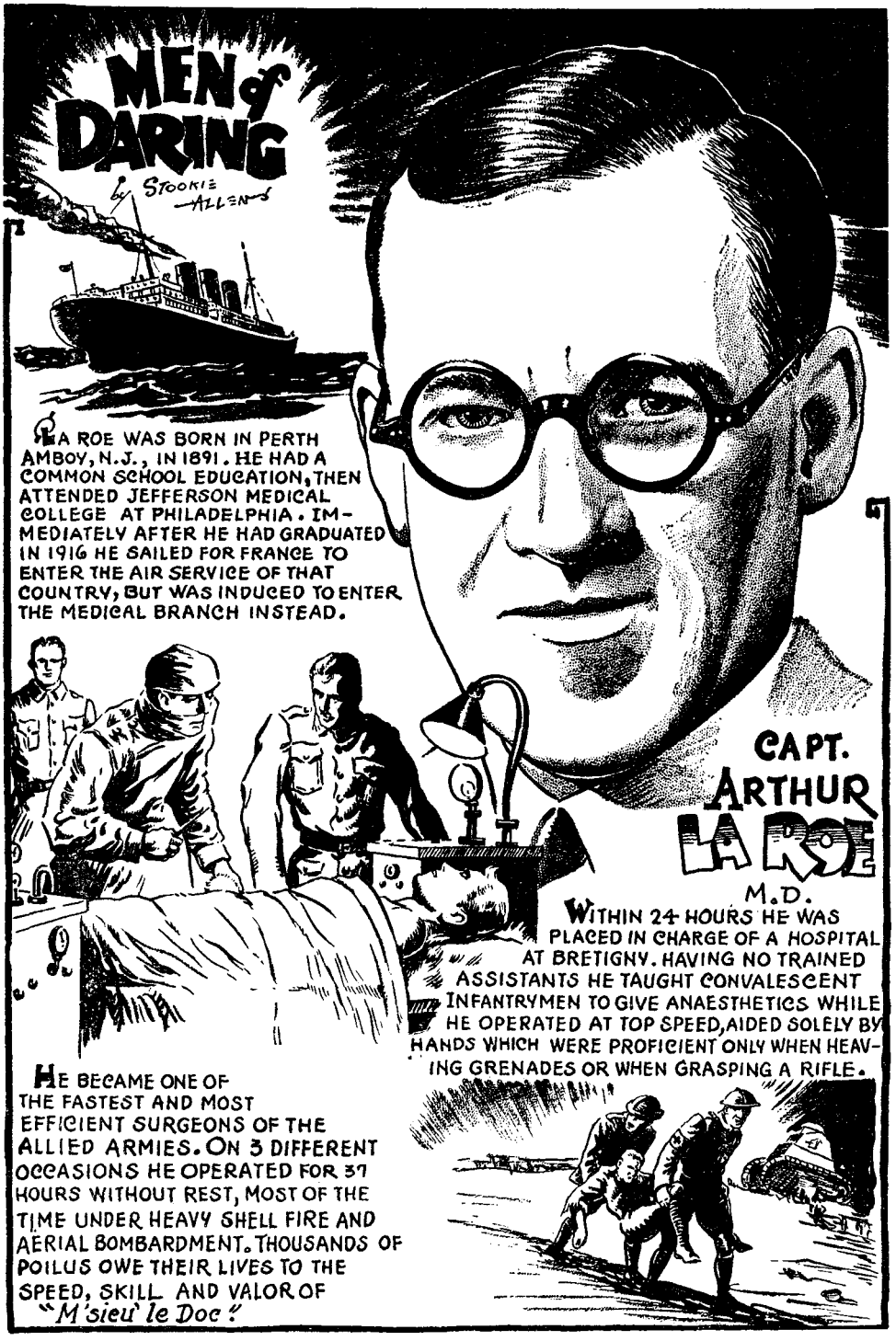
MEN of DARING
by STOOKIE ALLEN
LA ROE WAS BORN IN PERTH AMBOY, N.J., IN 1891. HE HAD A COMMON SCHOOL EDUCATION, THEN ATTENDED JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE AT PHILADELPHIA. IMMEDIATELY AFTER HE HAD GRADUATED IN 1916 HE SAILED FOR FRANCE TO ENTER THE AIR SERVICE OF THAT COUNTRY, BUT WAS INDUCED TO ENTER THE MEDICAL BRANCH INSTEAD.
CAPT. ARTHUR LA ROE M.D.
WITHIN 24 HOURS HE WAS PLACED IN CHARGE OF A HOSPITAL AT BRETIGNY. HAVING NO TRAINED ASSISTANTS HE TAUGHT CONVALESCENT INFANTRYMEN TO GIVE ANAESTHETICS WHILE HE OPERATED AT TOP SPEED, AIDED SOLELY BY HANDS WHICH WERE PROFICIENT ONLY WHEN HEAVING GRENADES OR WHEN GRASPING A RIFLE.
HE BECAME ONE OF THE FASTEST AND MOST EFFICIENT SURGEONS OF THE ALLIED ARMIES. ON 3 DIFFERENT OCCASIONS HE OPERATED FOR 37 HOURS WITHOUT REST, MOST OF THE TIME UNDER HEAVY SHELL FIRE AND AERIAL BOMBARDMENT. THOUSANDS OF POILUS OWE THEIR LIVES TO THE SPEED, SKILL AND VALOR OF "M'sieu' le Doc"

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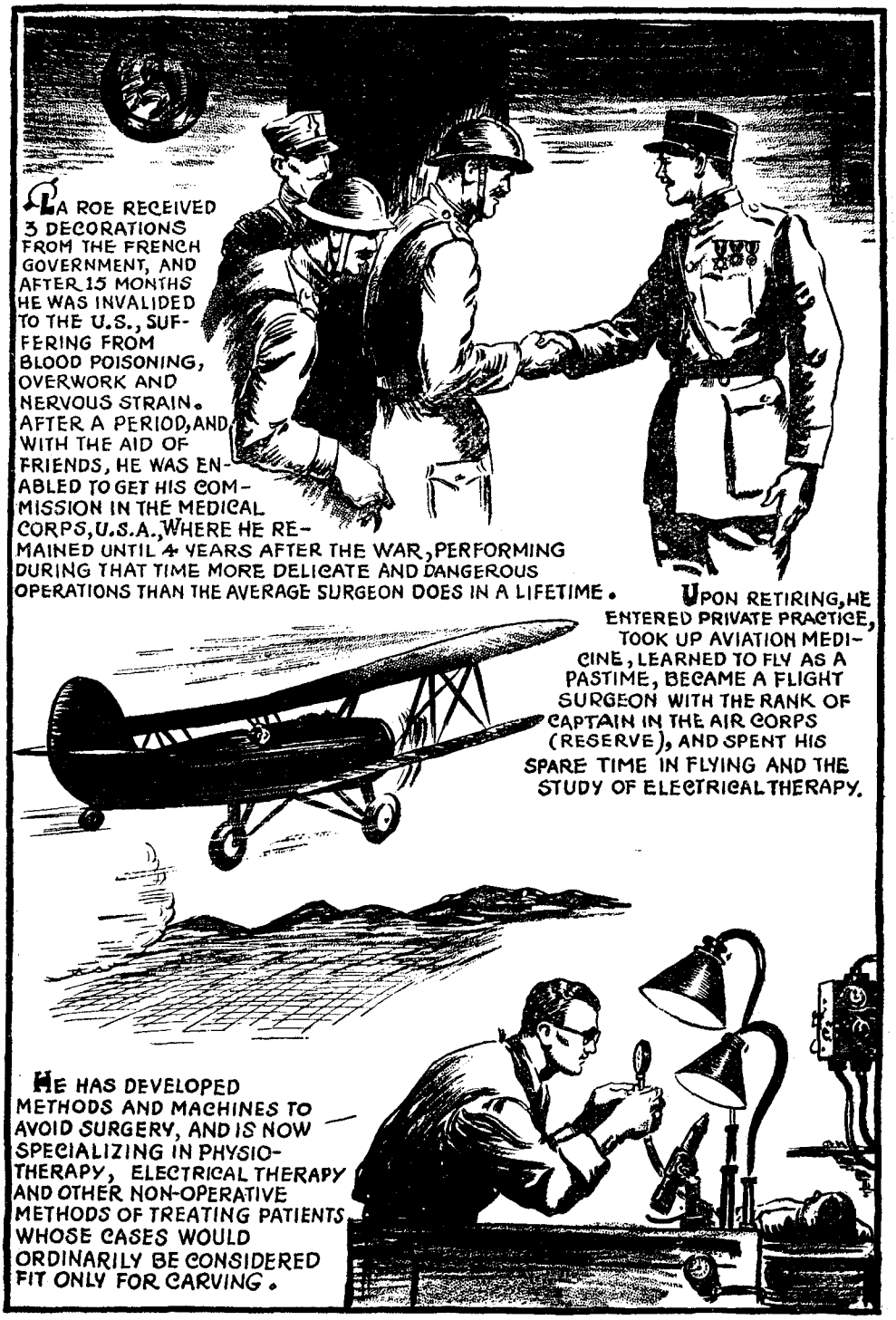
LA ROE RECEIVED 3 DECORATIONS FROM THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT, AND AFTER 15 MONTHS HE WAS INVALIDED TO THE U.S., SUFFERING FROM BLOOD POISONING, OVERWORK AND NERVOUS STRAIN. AFTER A PERIOD, AND WITH THE AID OF FRIENDS, HE WAS ENABLED TO GET HIS COMMISSION IN THE MEDICAL CORPS, U.S.A., WHERE HE REMAINED UNTIL 4 YEARS AFTER THE WAR, PERFORMING DURING THAT TIME MORE DELICATE AND DANGEROUS OPERATIONS THAN THE AVERAGE SURGEON DOES IN A LIFETIME.
UPON RETIRING, HE ENTERED PRIVATE PRACTICE, TOOK UP AVIATION MEDICINE, LEARNED TO FLY AS A PASTIME, BECAME A FLIGHT SURGEON WITH THE RANK OF CAPTAIN IN THE AIR CORPS (RESERVE), AND SPENT HIS SPARE TIME IN FLYING AND THE STUDY OF ELECTRICAL THERAPY.
HE HAS DEVELOPED METHODS AND MACHINES TO AVOID SURGERY, AND IS NOW SPECIALIZING IN PHYSIOTHERAPY, ELECTRICAL THERAPY AND OTHER NON-OPERATIVE METHODS OF TREATING PATIENTS WHOSE CASES WOULD ORDINARILY BE CONSIDERED FIT ONLY FOR CARVING.

Next Week: McKinley J. Hannan, Handy with a Six-gun

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Cart was fighting for his life now

A Grave Must Be Deep!

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Can a corpse walk? Cart Cartershall hadn't thought so until he attended that Haitian funeral

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN "Uncle Eli" Proudfoot was murdered at Morne Noir, his Haitian estate, his lawyer, Maître Tousellines, called together eight people for the reading of Uncle Eli's will. Seven of them were employed on the estate; the eighth was Patricia "Pete" Dale, New York artist's model, who had once been Uncle Eli's ward. She was accompanied by "Cart" Cartershall, her artist sweetheart.

The will stated that Uncle Eli was to be buried with voodoo ritual, with an iron stake driven through his heart after the burial. It also said that the entire estate was to go to Sir Duffin Wilburforce, his overseer, provided Sir Duffin stayed on the estate for twenty-four hours after the burial. If he failed to stay, the property was to go to the next named of the eight.

Before the twenty-four hours were up, the first seven on the list had been murdered, one by one. Lieutenant Nemo Narcisse of the Garde d'Haiti tried vainly to stem the murder tide and to find the guilty party or parties. He suspected Cart. Cart suspected everybody.

In the midst of this grim business, word came of a native uprising against the whites. The Cacos, who believed they were led by the *zombie* or spirit of Uncle Eli Proudfoot, were running amuck. To put a stop to the superstitions, Lieutenant Narcisse proceeded to dig up the grave of Uncle Eli. The lid had just been taken from the casket when natives in the sur-

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rounding darkness began shooting. Cart is telling the story.

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*)

ZOMBIE!

I DIDN'T have a chance to reach the pistol in my coat. You can't dig graves wearing the coat of your only and best suit, no matter the reduced condition of the garment. I'd shucked the jacket and hung it on the angel. Before I could broadjump the grave, bullets were coming like a blizzard from all points of the compass, woodpecking the tree, ricocheting off the angel's face.

Singing like an artillery shell, a hurled club blew over my head, and I dodged for the tree. Shadows were running on the slope below. Darkness sparked and crackled like a corn-pan on fire. The whack of police carbines as the Garde d'Haiti opened up. The slam, bang, thud and whang of all manner of gunnery downhill. The croon of flying lead, the whine of thrown knives, a startling chorus of caterwauls, shrieks, grunts, howls, mingled with the screams of the fleeing Christian gravediggers and the shrill shouts of Lieutenant Narcisse, and sent a rumpus of echoes running down the valley.

Already a khaki gendarme was down, mysteriously unable to rise, kicking as if he were trying to pedal a bicycle. Cornelius was rolling in the mud, struck somehow in the throes of a fit.

Stovepipe hat jammed over his eyebrows, Maître Tousellines crouched behind the mound of fresh sods, nursing his broken arm. Narcisse was sprawled flat on the clods, firing loudly at the dark. Little showers of dirt kept squirting up around his bandaged dome. The three remaining gendarmes lay belly to mud in a line beyond the tree; I couldn't see them, but I could see the fire of their guns; jumping one-two-three in the gloom like motorcycle exhausts. The gravediggers had departed in the direction of the Caribbean, and I never saw them again.

Thrown to the ground, the torches blazed like election night bonfires on the hilltop; the enemy was protected by night; and we were surrounded like an island. I wanted my pistol badly, finding myself armed with nothing more than a shovel. Under cover of the earthworks, I inched along with my eye on the angel where my coat was being torn to ragtag. It was tough traveling on that shot-swept hillcrest. I cursed myself bitterly for having abandoned Pete to the mercies of the château down below. By lifting my head and daring extinction, I could see the roofs in the valley. The valley was quiet, shadowy, moonlit. No lights showed in the house. I consoled myself with the thought that our preoccupation with the cemetery had decoyed the enemy assault to the hilltop. Small consolation when I remembered the cadaver in the grave at my back. It iced the water on my temples.

I dared a dash for my coat; ran headlong into a knot of Negroes who soared out of shadow and were at me like panthers. Negroes everywhere. I didn't get the pistol. I was thrown back against the monument. Face averted from the opening in the ground, I had to fight like a barbarian to save my life. Time stood at zero while I slapped black topknots with the shovel. It was like hitting gongs. The shovel rang. Blue bodies twirled and danced around me. I saw heads and hit them. Things hit me. I don't know

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why bullets didn't. Explosions were bursting on all sides. A stone caught me hard in the eye. My nose bled. Smoke, flame-balls, knife-shine, tooth-shine, black arms boiled around me where I stood under my guardian angel and stirred the tempest with a shovel.

I STIRRED that little battle into a witch's cauldron. Through that roaring surf of bodies and noise I caught crazy-quilt glimpses of Caribbean, jungle, valley, the moon-lit roofs of the château, and every time I thought of Pete I howled like a Choctaw and hit another head. Narcisse went pirouetting by me like a tackled football end. Tousellines sat on the ground with the top sheared from his hat and his arm in his lap. I guess the gendarmes were somewhere. It would not do to think of the man in the grave under the tree and those prim-pointed boot-toes. Fighting was better. Don't slug till you see the whites of their eyes.

Of course this heroic bit of biography wasn't as bold as it sounds and lasted half as long as the telling. The shovel rang *damn! damn! damn!* on half a dozen heads like black coconuts; and there must have been a hundred of those Cacos. Fifty for Narcisse. Fifty for the angel and me. I stood there with my nose-bleed and shinered eye, walloping out with the scoop, and I couldn't miss.

Somehow Narcisse had climbed the pedestal of the monument and was hanging there like a Bolshevik on Union Square, waving a bloody fist and hollering over the heads of the mob, "*Gran moon li mort! Cacos—ici —Voilà! Moon lit mort!*"

Tousellines shrieked at me, "Let them come, *m'sieu!* He tells them the old man is dead — demands them to look in the grave and see—"

Whatever the officer was trying to tell them, his howls only served to inflame the riot, drawing a volley that sent him leaping from his rostrum. "*Non! Non!*" was the roaring response. "*Papa Proudfoot gran' zombie—*" Narcisse was thrown crabwise through a smoke-billow. Lights banged all over the hilltop. If those Haitian natives were marksmen I'd have been shot to sponge, but they made up in ferocity what they lacked in science. "*Papa Proudfoot! Papa Proudfoot! —Zombie! Zombie!*" Anything Narcisse could say wouldn't drown that battle cry.

Loudest of all it screeched from a twisted mouth that swam at me through the din. A big black man, naked to the belt, with a rifle club-fashion in his hands. Sinews egged out on him like lumps of wet coal; his face was all out of shape; his mouth— I remembered that mouth. Hare-lip Louis, the gendarme corporal, who'd been left in the house to guard Pete!

He plunged at me, swinging his rifle at my head, yelling. I shouted his name, and he struck at me again. The gun-butt sliced past my face. I hit at him with the shovel. Larruping downward, his rifle-stock whacked my hands, and the shovel went flying out of my fingers.

I screamed his name and jumped him, grabbing his arms, throwing him flat under a trampling morass of ankles and feet. I banged his head against the angel's pedestal. I screamed, "Where's Pete! Where's Pete! Where's *ma'm-selle?*" and let up on him for an answer.

He squalled, "*Ma'mselle* no more! *Zombie* come to house call Louis, tell Louis go 'long Cacos! Louis see *zom-*

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bie! Zombie boss Louis! Papa Proudfoot gran' *zombie—*"

I drove a knee in his stomach and banged his head. "Where's the girl?"

He kicked his heels, fighting like a cat. He screeched:

"*Ma'mselle* in château. *Ma'mselle* finish. *Zombie* tell Louis go away from door. *Zombie* go to door, finish *ma'mselle—*"

HIS eyes were white mirrors of terror, glaring shiny into mine. He got a thumb on my cheek, slid it over the bone and pressed on my eye. We rolled through a churn of legs. Something hit me a crack on the neck; driving me sideways. Louis wrenched away from my hands, planted a foot in my spine and shoved me smothering into the mound of soft clods. I got my fingers closed on something that felt like iron; rolled; bounded to my feet, the iron crowbar that had been the stake in the grave gripped in my hands. I saw the hare-lipped face, screamed, "What happened to the girl? Pete! Pete!" and swung the iron stake.

Louis dodged. I shouted at him, swinging the stake. That solid iron post seemed light as a feather and it must have weighed plenty. It missed a lot of heads, spun me in a futile twirl and spanked the granite angel a whack in the pants. Stone splinters spurted through the air. The blow tore the bar from my fingers. I staggered backward and had to windmill my arms to keep from flopping into the grave.

Louis towered over me. I perceived there was a knife in that upraised fist where the rifle had been. I saw the blade was aimed to stab me between the eyes. It didn't come. I seemed to be waiting. The knife seemed to be waiting. The blade wouldn't drop. The black man had jammed the joint of his elbow. The effort to bring down the knife wrung streams of ink from his forehead, started his eyes from their sockets.

Then I saw those goo-gooed eyes weren't looking at me, but over my shoulder at something behind my back! The cry that blew from his rabbit lips would have waked the dead. And did!

"Stop!" The voice spoke out of the grave.

In a quiet so total and sudden the night seemed to have smashed, I spun and looked down.

The body in the coffin moved! The hands beneath the black cape stirred. The eye in the shroud was wide open, glassy, staring. The cloaked mouth moved in its cowl-like wrappings, and a voice came through the cloth in a muffled, toneless neigh—

"Cacos, I come— The King of all *Zombies* waits to lead you. Let the dead master rise from his tomb—"

The voice died out in a horse-like, whinnying sigh. The black-wrapped head lifted slowly from its pillow. The body in the coffin swayed to a stand. There was a hideous minute while I stared at the dark stain over the breast. A corresponding smear where the cape had been torn out the back. I could see where the stake, going through, had left a dent in the bottom of the coffin. Once more I was glaring at a streak of color across the toe of the left shoe. Dandelion yellow!

CHAPTER XIV.

BURIED!

"*VIVE LE MORT!* King of all *Zombies—*"

"*Vive le mort!* King of all *Zombies—*"

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"*Exurgent mortui!*"

"*Exurgent mortui!*"

The minute won't be clocked when I can efface the memory of that black, mummy-like body coming out of his grave after twenty-four hours interment in a coffin anchored by an iron stake and tons of angel; nor will I forget the look of that empty casket with the dent in its floor on the grave-bottom, while its rightful inhabitant stood beside the mound of sods that had covered him, arms spread out under the cloak, the one live eye showing in the black-muffled face like a gleaming fish-scale, the clammy voice doing things to that Caco mob.

The voice neighed through black cloth—that flabbergasting gibberish—and the woolly heads of the Negroes lifted and fell like cabbages on a sea. The hidden mouth spoke and the mob bayed a recitative chant. The fallen torches spluttered, shedding a salmon-colored light through nodding top-knots and moonray slanting down through the bones of the silk cotton tree scarred the black-wrapped head with blue striping.

Picture that silhouetted figure on the dirt mound, that blue-striped shadow-blob face with its single glazed eye. Listen to that talk from the tomb, and look at one white man, one-eyed himself, paralyzed on the fringe of the scene.

The grave yawned between me and that thing on the mound; from what source I drew the power of locomotion I don't know; but I made a backward fumble to find my coat, and picked my pocket for the gun. My hand on that gun was like a leaf of lettuce, but I got it somehow.

"You've been in the house!" I bawled. "What have you done with the girl—"

The cry tore a cartilage in my throat; broke shrill as a child's above that gobbling Caco chant. God knows what answer I expected; certainly not the one that came

The mob choked silent, and the thing on the clod pile wheeled and impaled me with a glance from that fish-scale eye. All the venom in the world was concentrated in that stare. It went through my head and came out the back and pinched the skin on my neck-nape. The hate in that eye would have poisoned a rattlesnake.

"Fool!" came the muffled malediction. "Would you speak thus rudely to a *zombie?*"

"*Zombie* be damned," I croaked. "The girl — what have you done to her—"

The lidless, mica-bright eye seemed to kindle green in its socket. The cataleptic voice gave a heathenish sort of giggle. "I have taken care of the girl," neighed the thing across the grave, "hee hee hee! The ungrateful little wench has been paid for her thanklessness. I shot her through both her little eyes at eleven o'clock tonight—"

"God—"

I swung the pistol, working the trigger. The trigger labored and the black gun chattered like a typewriter. The black thing, monstrous across the grave, screamed out in its cape; but it wasn't shot. Those bullets had been used up on Toadstool.

MY visual impressions went blind, but I heard that cloth-drugged mouth screaming, "Blackguard, would you try to murder the dead?" and the black mob came in two hollering rivers around the ends of the grave and crashed on top of me. Hare-lip Louis hit me like a falling oak; I was thrown like a calf; ropes sailed

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over my head; thongs pinned my hands behind my back; I was trussed before I could excavate my face from the mud.

I was picked up, thrown from hand to hand, shuttled, whirled like wheat rushed through a binder, and my next impression was total paralysis in a monstrous ball of twine, bound neck to foot like a stick wrapped with kite-string.

Tottering like an invalid, the black-cloaked figure came down off its rostrum, and moved at me, cawing like a witch. It might have been an old woman in mourning gowns shrilling senile imprecations at a vandal in her cemetery lot. Only—

"How would you like," came the crow-like voice, "to try my coffin for your own?"

I could only stare.

The black cape swished the mud, as the dark figure whirled. "*Cacos, ici!* To the grave with him!"

Black hands shot out to grab me. I was lifted like a sack of meat, held horizontally over the grave, dropped. If I hadn't been spun in a cocoon of rope, that ten-foot drop into a coffin would have broken my spine and killed me then and there. A moment was coming when I was going to wish it had.

My head walloped the pillow; the jolt whacked my breath out; then I could see my own boots pointed at their end of the rosewood retainer, earthen walls sheared up on either side, and far above my face the sky was a rectangle of yeasty clouds streaking a dome of night. Far above my feet the black-shrouded figure in its cape was crucified against the moon, arms widespread like wings, chin on stained bosom, that one ulcerous eyeball of frosted hate glittering down at me.

A melancholy cold invaded the grave. A Negro with the face of an Egyptian looked down at me with a shovel in his hands.

The crucified silhouette dropped its arms. "Bury him!"

That was my requiem. I suppose I was hollering and kicking, for little cascades of pebbles came slithering down the grave walls and rattled on my rosewood frame. Then a black shadow hovered like an airplane wing over the foot of the grave. The lid was thrown down with a stunning crash, and I shouted in total darkness.

The dead was burying me alive!

WHANG! In all the good world I will never hear again a sound as appalling as that first coffin nail going into the lid. I'd waited in mortal suspense for that sound, and when it came I must have glowed with terror. Whang-bang-whang-bang! It didn't take those spikes long to travel around the lid-rim. Feet that had scuffled on the lid stopped scuffling. A little cone of gray light sifted down through the coffin cover where a foot standing over the stake-hole had been removed.

Light! Flat in that house of darkness I watched a misty and miserable little funnel of foggy light the way one might watch Hope balanced on a sobbing abyss. That light was the mother of the world. Down in that sunken coffin it was like the sun. I could crank up my neck, crane my head from its corrosive pillow and stare down my nose at the fainting little ray; and I wept while it was there. I'd been extravagant with the sun, before. I'd blown out matches. I'd complained at electric signs. I know better manners, now. I know one could almost do with-

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out air if there was light for the seeing of the end. How I breathed at that stingy handful of illumination, sprained my neck to stare at it, begged it to stay.

Thud! It was gone. Now there was another sound on the coffin lid. Thud-thud-thud. I howled to keep the echo out of my ears, but the thudding was louder in my black prison. The thudding of clods raining down on a casket—more particularly, *my* casket! I didn't stop screaming, but my throat did, and I had to lie there flat on my back and listen to that earth blizzarding down. It was loud at first. Too damnably loud.

Then it receded, was muffled, faint. Too damnably faint.

Now my ears were begging to hear those clods the way my eyeball had entreated at the light. And now, like the light, the sound was extinguished, and the only echo in the coffin was the constricted rustling of my movements, little scratchings in the dark, blood pounding in my ears.

I could hear my bootheels rattling on the floor at their end of the box, the breath pumping in and out of my lungs. The low altitude had affected my respiration. The darkness was playing on my nerves. Dark? Mix all the blacks together—Black Tom and Black Friday and black plague and black mass—and compound them with India ink, and the color would have shone like radium in that rosewood casket buried on a hilltop in Haiti.

The air was too black, too foul and thick-black to breathe. The clod that had plugged the lid-hole had dropped a spoonful of earth on my chest and the weight was like a soft foot pressing down. I rolled on my side to rid my chest of the earth, but the weight persisted. Then I hitched along the coffin floor until my toes touched end. Then I hitched back into the head-end until my scalp bumped. Craftily I figured the coffin was about seven by two and a half, and frantically I tried to remember about cubic inches of air, but the only thing I could remember was that black-cloaked figure swooping out of the grave and the fiendish voice neighing, "I shot her through the eyes—"

I rolled from side to side. I tried desperately to lie still, and then I could feel that dent in the floor under my left shoulder-blade, and I had to move. Pete had been killed! Pete had been killed! The words banged back and forth in my mind. Lord! Killed by that thing! And I was dying, now. Dying in that suffocating blackness deep underground—

I BEGAN to yell and thrash, roll and drum my heels, crying Pete's name, shouting, cursing. The acoustics in a coffin are bad. My voice was stifled in the airless confinement. My cries were like lead, loud but without color or resonance in that coagulated underground dark. I couldn't tell whether I shouted or thought I shouted. I lay gasping on my back and wondered if the grave was half filled, three quarters filled, filled. A queer half stupor was stuffing up my head like a bad cold, and ideas jittered around in my brain like comatose dreams.

Suddenly I was remembering a news story I'd once read in the *Trib* about two mechanics asphyxiated by gasoline fumes. Revived by serum injections, they were told by astonished doctors that their hearts had stopped twelve minutes. One died when the heart stopped, whereupon the curious physicians wondered how it felt to be

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dead; but the garage men replied uneasily that they hadn't felt anything. Down there in my own tomb, I recalled having remarked about this article to Pete.

"Then death's like that," I had pointed. "Like fainting, and gets half a column on the second page. A blank. There isn't any heaven."

"Who wants to believe in the old fashioned heaven?" Pete had demurred. (Her voice came out of memory so distinctly I could almost hear it. I could remember the scene of the incident. We'd blown ourselves to the Grand Central Oyster Bar, and she was perched on a stool and smiling over the newspaper—) "Who wants Saint Peter to pin 'em with a lot of dusty medals for good deeds long since forgotten that should've been done anyway? But that newspaper doesn't prove death is a blank. Religious people would say those men hadn't died. Spiritualists would say they came back and lost any memory of what happened on the other side. I'd say—let's worry about living and when the time comes I can take it. I'm dying for some of those clams—"

Good God! I lay dying in a coffin in Haiti and thinking of the Grand Central Oyster Bar in New York. And Pete was dead. Pete, who'd said she could take it. Hot tears made scalding red flashes in the black that blindfolded my eyes. My fault she'd come to this cursed island. I had it coming to me for leaving her in that château. Fate was a leper with a grinning tongue—to turn loose on her that twenty-four hours of abomination. If I could only have plunged my hands into the folds of that black cape; ripped the shroud off that fish-eyed creature out of the coffin. Who? What manner of fiendish bogle had resurrected itself from Uncle Eli's grave? With yellow oil paint on his shoe—

"Oh, God— Get me out of here—"

THERE was a time, down in that midnight-dank, airless coffin, when I wanted to pray; when I had to dig my teeth in my underlip to keep from shouting for celestial mercy that might have been inclined not to recognize my voice. Comfort is the reward of the steadfast in faith; not for the last-minute convert frightened by a showdown.

"Besides, you've got to die sometime," I bellowed at myself. "Everybody does!"

The only difference being that most people weren't buried beforehand and didn't have to watch it coming. Most people thought they were never going to die. Crowds in cities rushing pell-mell past the undertakers, laughing and singing and cursing, mobbing for theaters and restaurants and stock markets and assignations—dying every one of them—condemned by every clock-tick—never knowing—

"Hoo-hoo-hoo—"

I had to laugh. I suppose the hearse-black confinement, the ground-cold, the evil staling of the air was making me a little morbid. Laughter dried my throat to a herring. Tightened a tourniquet of pressure around my chest. A sort of redness that wasn't color swam behind my eyelids. I could hear myself panting like a thirsty spaniel. I could hear the involuntary drumming of my heels on the hard floor. I heard myself say out loud, "Those two mechanics didn't feel anything—" I shouted, fought to sit up, mashed my forehead against the invisible roof, tossed from elbow to elbow. God! How many feet of earth were over me now? Was the grave filled? Were

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they patting the mound flat with shovels? The Marines! Didn't they know I was down there in Haiti, smothering? *Down* there in Haiti, was right! Get me out of that darkness! Just give me a chance, one more chance at that thing who'd shot a helpless girl—Lord! All this struggling made me drink up the air. Why couldn't I lie still?

"Take it like a man!" I screamed at myself.

"There's no such a thing as a *zombie!*" I shrieked.

"Quit bawling," I howled at myself. "The heart just stops—"

"But there was a stake through Uncle Eli's heart," I howled. "That thing—stained cloak—came out alive—shot Pete, Pete, Pete—"

I remember the smothering as of a great muff of feathers held over my mouth and nose, a giddy slowing up of the heart, a ballooning of the head. A lot of little doors in my brain blew open and a kaleidoscope of words, sensations, mental pictures, catcalls and colors callioped around in my mind as I fought and shouted. My heart was a ball of terror, my lungs chugging engines that seemed to turn a pinwheel—a wild flashing jumble like one of those Russian films showing buildings at angles and things coming every which way. Ambrose, Sir Duffin, the En-sign, Widow Gladys, Manfred, Toadstool, Ti Pedro—faces in the pinwheel. A doctor staggering across the lawn by an iron dog. A little old darky with a face of crêpe reading a will. A mulatto officer brandishing a saber.

The pinwheel was whirling furiously against a nightmare-gray hill, against an old house dripping with vines; and Pete was a shadow with a picture hat in hand frozen before a black and headless silhouette that stood in a coffin and reached at her with wing-like arms. I was trying to kill him with a pistol that only chattered in my hand, and something from behind was choking me. Pete was calling my name, calling my name—

Darkness smashed around me into a million confetti colors. The pinwheel burst. The bottom dropped out of everything.

CHAPTER XV.

DEAD OR ALIVE!

IT was queer how the voice persisted; how it came through a vacuum-like, foggish, swimming barrier that had neither color nor form, like a lost messenger running in misty corridors, paging me in emptiness. A called name hunting through nebulous vacancy. An echo trying to find the place where echoes go. "Cart— Oh, Cart—"

I'd dreamed this dream before; only this time it wasn't a dream because I was dead. But the dream persisted with the voice and a misty shine was penetrating the fog. The little echo carrying a candle, running about this way and that, trying to find its way home. "Cart— Cart—"

The gray mist brightened to pale yellow, like the shine of the sun on the bottom of a thunderhead. Fog wreathed and swam, and through its vapors came the recollection of a face; a memory that blurred and retreated, swam into focus like something seen through tears, steadied and was there. Something in me tried to sit up. I thought, "Pete, is that you?"

The echo was getting nearer, nearer. "Cart—can you hear me—please answer—please—"

I thought, "Sure, I can hear you, Pete. Those mechanics were wrong—"

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The echo and the yellow shine and the face merged together, sound, form and color in a point of saffron behind smoke. "Please come on — Please don't lie here, Cart — Please don't fall again — There now — Stand up—" I was sleepy, dreaming I heard Pete's voice, saw her face in mist. Mist that fluttered and whispered, the yellow shine moving ahead of me and Pete's dim features just beyond the shine. Somehow she was reaching out her arms to me, and I was struggling to move after them through the dream. Just as I would touch them, the dream would end. Then the voice would come paging me; I would see the light; fight to my feet and move on.

"A little farther — just a little farther, Cart—I can't drag you—please!"

I laughed idiotically; banged my head hard against something; dragged to my feet and opened one eye. Pete seemed to be there with a candle in one hand, propping me up against a black wall with the other. Tears were running down her face. She was shaking me angrily. She was teasing at me to move, to come on, to stand up and get going, like the Widow Gladys taunting Toadstool up the staircase. For a minute I thought we were on the staircase. Pete said very clearly, "Come down these steps—"

But the dream washed into darkness and I thought we were moving in a tunnel. Close walls on either side and a heaviness of dust, black as coal, and I seemed to be stumbling and colliding, fumbling with Pete and the light. I thought I said, "Raisin bread down here!" and I thought I could hear Pete saying, "Yes, Cart. Yes — Please come on—"

In the dream I stumbled dizzily, on and on, and Pete was towing me by the hand, begging me to follow. I thought I heard her say, "Take slow, deep breaths." Then I thought I was taking slow, deep breaths. Immediately her voice spoke out of memory so clearly I thought it wasn't a dream. I thought I opened one eye and stared at a blazing candle and Pete was there clear as day.

"Thank God!" she cried. "We're there now. There's some whisky will fix you. Can you hear me?"

"Where are we?" My voice was as loud as reality.

"The house," came the words, distinct as speech. "Slowly here. Steps. You take the candle and I'll go first—"

I seemed to reach out and take the candle. Then I fell on steps I couldn't see with the candle, smashed the diminutive flame under a clumsy sprawl, inhaled a mouthful of cobweb, faded into oblivion. In oblivion I was choking. Coughing and choking. I threw my head back to stop it. Something cracked on the back of my head. I woke up.

I WOKE up sitting against the roll-top desk in the office under the stairs, my legs outstretched in front of me on the floor, my back propped against the desk; and Pete had a hand under my chin and was pouring whisky from a square brown bottle into my teeth. A wax candle blinked atop the desk, directing a shadow-dance along the inverted stairway of the ceiling. I could hear rain throwing itself in gusts against the dim blue shine of the little church window. I stared, swallowing fire, at the panel in the wall near the squat iron safe; and made out a vague inner flight of steps that must be the passage up to Uncle Eli's wardrobe. I had a fuddled impression I'd just taken a fall down those shadowy steps. I swallowed another gulp, and heard a sound outside

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somewhere, a sort of mass meeting babble muffled by closed doors.

"I'm alive," I whispered tentatively, and hearing my own voice brought me around with a bang. "*Pete! I'm alive!*"

Kneeling against me, she put a wrist over her eyes and began to cry. We *were* in that office! The stairway, the rain, the candle-glimmer, the babble beyond the hall door, Pete— I threw a hand to my face. A cauliflowered eye. No wonder my vision was addled. Lord, what a headache! I grabbed Pete's arm, electrified.

"I'm all right, Pete. You—*you*—"

"It was awful," she said faintly. "No water. I couldn't bring you out of it. Then I heard you breathe. You did get to your feet. Then just as you'd come around you'd faint again."

I clapped a hand to my blinded eye; sent my good eye darting. "Pete, I was knocked cold. It must have been this blow in the eye—"

"Cart, I thought you were gone—"

"Gone?" I panted. "I dreamed I was dead. Good Lord! I dreamed— I dreamed we'd dug up Uncle Eli. Something—a thing black and alive— came out of the coffin. Paint on the side of his shoe and—" Memory bombed in my head. "He said he'd killed you. Shot you dead. Yes! There was a fight. Cacos. That hare-lipped gendarme came at me. Said you'd been finished. Good God! it must have been then I was hit! No, but I saw the black body in the grave before the Cacos came and—" I clutched my forehead. "That crack on the head has me all twisted up—"

"Drink the rest of this," Pete whispered. "We mustn't stay any longer. I—I haven't a gun—"

I swallowed another gulp. Pete balled up her handkerchief and scrubbed grime and dried blood off my mouth and nose.

"Wow, what a dream!" I panted out. "It seemed they buried me in the coffin. The Cacos—up there in that graveyard. Nailed on the lid. Why— it was real, Pete, real as the devil and I—I can't seem to figure where the reality ended and the dream began."

Her lips were white, her mouth tensed. "Cart, can you stand?"

I put my hands on the floor and pushed myself upright. Pete held me against the desk. My head was splitting, but my one available eye had cleared.

"A whole mess of bad dreams," I gasped on. "First I thought you and I—on the staircase—only somehow we were Widow Gladys and Toadstool— and then I thought we were in the tunnel where—" Heat flowed up from my stomach; another thought bombed through my brain. "Where's Touselines?" I caught Pete's shoulder. "And Narcisse?"

"I—"

"What's that *sound?*"

"Quiet!" She turned from me swiftly and sent a glance of fear at the door to the hall. Beyond the door, the hall was filling with noise, as if a crowd was pouring in from the veranda, tramping and stamping and clapping hands. The door was closed, and the uproar rattled the knob. I took a breath to speak. Pete whirled; put her fingers over my mouth.

"They're in the hall—"

I WASN'T punch drunk now. The house was echoing to a bedlamite clamor, a thumping and drumming, an undertone sifting of rumba gourds, sticks clacking together and beating time to a weird off-key singsong — *do-re-mi* — *do-re-mi* — that

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was nerved faster and faster, louder and louder in a din that shook the office door, tremored the floor under me, vibrated the ceiling.

I snatched the chunky bottle and tried to drain sense down my throat. Fingers gripped icy on my wrist, Pete stood, wide-eyed, watching the door. Bodies seemed to be rushing pellmell in the hall, trampling like an elephant herd, trumpeting that three-note chant. Then a drum boomed out a tremendous rataplan, the rushing and chanting dropped into a well of quiet, and telephoned through the office door came a thin-piped, whinnying echo like a voice heard from a rooming-house speaking tube.

"Silence, Cacos— The King of all *Zombies* speaks—"

Liquor, dizziness, headache, everything went out of me in one single shock. I remembered that voice coming from the lobby of the hall. I knew that neighing whinny beyond the door. Raw-nerved, I made a convulsive grab at Pete's arm.

"It's *him!*"

Before she could realize my meaning, the voice was going again.

"The King of all *Zombies,* the White Master of the Dead, would tell the living black that those who follow him can never die! The dead who fall with him shall be raised again. Behold, Cacos, the master of life and death, the un-dead come to rule from the tomb beyond— Speak, Tousellines, and tell them what I say—"

I could have sworn a subterranean hand was rocking the floor. Quivering, one-eyed, panting in the candle-lit stuffiness of that office under the stairs, I had to catch the edge of the desk and glare at the door beyond which a speaker, undeniably Tousellines, had started a mewling stream of creole in a tone so soprano with terror it almost whistled. The parroted jitter was answered by a cannonade of cheers. Once more the drum boomed for silence; the horse-like whinny echoed down the hall.

"Behold the dead from the grave, risen to lead you! Behold the white *zombie* came to show you the way. Attend, Cacos! Arm! Send word through the *mornes.* Let your brothers answer the call. Say no harm can befall the black who follows in the service of the *zombie* king. Say no evil can come to him who joins forces with the un-dead dead— Tell them, Tousellines, tell them—"

"Pete," I whispered, "it's him— *him*—"

Tousellines squealed; sound broke in surf waves that shook through the door to alarm the candle and rattle the rain-hammered window; the drum outside brought a smash of silence, the neighing went on—

"Cacos, the army of your country comes to bring you harm. Tomorrow the brothers of your race will come to wrest victory from your hands. But the hills are yours for the taking. The land, the rivers, fields, all shall be yours. Call your friends to a day of conquest. Call the blacks to the army of the King of the Dead. Spread word the *zombie* master has come from his grave to lead. Behold him standing in his palace before you to lead you again as last night, from victory to victory. Remember the gold of yesterday; arise, conquer for the gold of tomorrow. Cacos, the Dead King calls. Tell them, Tousellines! Speak!"

TRANSLATING this rhapsodic jargon into creole did not seem to agree with the oratorical powers of Master Tousellines. His frantic

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caterwauling shrilled like the language of a terrified monkey. The ensuing din filled the house with a rumpus of echoes, a pipe-organ percussion that shook a dust-cloud from the office walls. "Papa Proudfoot! Papa Proudfoot!" That name blasted from a jungle of throats and whitened my hair.

Robbed of animation, I could only hang to the desk, knees shaking; stare one-eyed at the door, at Pete, at the door.

I had been in that coffin! Pete—Pete, who had been killed—

She was purple-eyed. Illuminated with candle-shine, her face was colorless porcelain. She stood with a distracted hand in the glinty thicket of her hair, staring at the door, whispering. "Mad," her voice just came to me. "Stark, raving mad—"

Silence gushed again from the hall. Rain at the office window seemed real enough; but that midnight deluge was the only reality in that cataclysmic moment; never before or since have I heard a voice as unworldly as the whinnying farrago out there in the hall, or known a scene as unnatural as the two of us with the candle listening there in that closed office.

"Cacos, the King of the *Zombies* has spoken!" The neigh ascended to a raucous, cold-in-the-chest scream. "Behold the white dead man who lives with the heart torn from his body. Behold the corpse upright from his tomb. Arise and salute! Follow and conquer! Behold Papa Proudfoot, King of the *Zombies*, new Emperor of Haiti—"

I don't know whether the cheered blast opened the door, or whether Pete opened it. I know she had stepped forward to put a hand on the knob. Her fingers, drawn from her hair, had loosed a gleaming shawl about her shoulders; her face was marble; and she had moved with a hypnotic fixity, a somnambulant effort that I couldn't have stopped. My hands shaking the desk had brought the rolltop slamming down on my fingers (I never saw them bleeding until afterwards) and I could not have stopped her. Not I, fresh out of my coffin ten feet underground, my wits gone kiting, my left eye a cabbage and my fingers caught in a desk and my right eye staring at that picture framed by the opened door.

I know one picture I'll never pass off with a secret (if envious) feeling that I could do a better. The picture of that hall, framed by the office door. Pen and ink sketch, black and white.

Black for the swooped-up shadows, the murky corners, the balcony's overhang, the cloudy loft of the ceiling. Black for the massed heads piled before the black front door, shiny black for bald spots, blue-black for cheekbones, upthrown fists, knots of muscle. Tar for the statue of Tousellines petrified near the library door; and blackest of all, the figure silhouetted against the charcoal smudge of the opened library, arms wide, cape-wings spread in bat-like profile.

And white for the candles that gleamed pale in burnt-cork hands, the outshooting pinpoints of light sketched through the dark, the eggs of Negroid eyes, the ivory grins of piano-key teeth. Blue-white for the shine on gun barrel and machete; gray-white for the bandaged head of Lieutenant Narcisse, dimly visible between two baleful Nubians. White shadows for the sheet-wound row seen regimented on the library floor; and whitest of all for the torso of the black-winged thing in that doorway, the face like a plaster death mask, the hands like talons of bone at

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the tip of each wing, the body to the belt like a skinny, blue, butcher-shop chicken, ribs and wishbone poking through.

ONE splash of ruby had dropped in that pen sketch, and the smear glowed like a badge on that naked chicken-breast. The thing turned its head in the library door and stood like the Prussian eagle. I saw two eyes like fish scales, the mouth a blue trap under the blade-hooked nose, the strip of adhesive on the tall, bald forehead. And then it wasn't the Prussian eagle, but a horrible and perverted Blue Eagle, for I saw a carpenter's hammer in one fist of talons, in the other a shiny handful of spikes.

A corpse holding a mass meeting! A dead man making a speech! No wonder an eerie gale was blowing through the hall, fluttering the drapes on his skinny arms, stirring the cobweb hairs on his skull.

He lifted the hammer in a sort of dictator's salute—

"Papa Proudfoot, King of all *Zombies*—"

The black and white hall shook with the response, the shouting of white-fringed mouths, drums knuckled, rumba-rattles going like applause in a night club. A palsy seemed to infect the timbers of the house. Wind rushed through the surging, massed heads and flattened the candle-flames on their wicks. Narcisse's ashen countenance, dimly visible between the shoulders of the Nubians supporting him, was distorted and wet. He was moaning like a sick man. The thing in the library door lifted its fistful of spikes and screamed.

"Papa Proudfoot, Emperor of Haiti— Tomorrow, Cacos! Tomorrow we strike! Put flame to the enemy! Pillage and burn! Haiti is ours! Tell them," the blue mouth raved at Tousellines, "that Papa Proudfoot leaves them a moment for an errand with the *Culte des Morts*. Bid them execute this traitor Narcisse and the body is theirs for the sport. Say I go to my office for consultation with the dead. Send the black Louis upstairs to bring down the body of the dead *Ma'mselle* Dale, and then—"

"*Uncle Eli!*"

In memory to this day that name, as Pete cried it then, puts a creep in the part of my hair. Every egg in that black basket of white eyes rolled at the frail shade in the office door. The thing in the library door whipped its isinglass stare straight at the office where Pete moved.

I yanked my fingers out of the desk and the top came down with a little report.

"*Uncle Eli!*"

Pete moved into the candle-gloom of the hall. Her arm seemed to float up from her side, finger pointed at the Dracula-face of the exhumed in front of her. The bat couldn't budge. The hammer fell from one bunch of claws and banged on the floor like a shot. The nails showered down like a ringing rain.

"Uncle Eli, I condemn you as my murderer. I condemn you for the deaths of those in your household. Tell them, Tousellines," she cried, "that the Princess of the Dead has come to claim the throne. Shot through the eyes, I was, but I rise from death to accuse my assassin and break the evil spell he would put on these Cacos and their country. Speak my command, Tousellines—the Queen of the *Zombies*—has come—"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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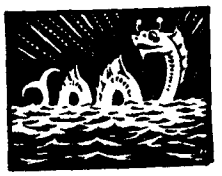
STRANGER *than* FICTION



By JOHN S. STUART

JUST A MOUTHFUL!

CLAMS are indeed a large family. Members range from three inches in length, which are quite common, to "Gigas," which are forty-three inches long, weighing 600 pounds.

ROADSIDE SHAVERS

IN the Chinese villages, commuters, if there are such people, get a break. Along the highway are to be found itinerant barbers who set up shop beside a tree, and shave any customers who tarry on their journey. In social standing the barber is on a par with the actor.

A NEW USE FOR MILK

DR. SOLÉ, of Vienna, has just finished some remarkable experiments. He has discovered that bleeding will stop in two minutes when human milk is applied on cotton tampons. Previously six to eight minutes was the minimum time when blood would coagulate—table salt is often used.

THE ONCE-OVER

AN X-ray machine has just been developed which makes it possible to study the eye when the eyelids are closed. It is designed for use in finding foreign particles in the eyes, showing cataracts or tumors, and whether the optic nerve is alive. The patient closes his eye, places it against a tube with a diaphragm of lead. When the X-ray is turned on, the eye is projected on the sensitive diaphragm.

$48,000 FOR A BELL!

A BELL which will weigh about twenty tons and will be nine feet high and ten feet in circumference, is to be placed on top of Chiu Hua Mountain in Anhui Province, China. Buddhist societies in Shanghai plan to spend $48,000 for this bell. It is expected it will be heard within a radius of about 30 miles.

STRENGTH OF THE RHINO

THE warriors of West Africa (Wajagga tribe) prepare for war by drinking native beer, made "magical" with the shavings of the hide and horn of a powerful rhinoceros. They firmly believe that the strength of the rhinoceros is imparted to them through this drink, when the protective spirits are pleased with their campaign.

NO DEPRESSION FOR OYSTERS!

THE University of Washington has found a booster for depressions. Professor Kincaid has been conducting some tests on oyster culture, and locked up one hundred oysters in a tank of clear water for ten months. The oysters grew fat!

TEN PAIRS OF TWINS

AT the Post Road Public School in White Plains, New York, there are ten pairs of twins in attendance. Their ages range from five to fourteen years. Some look alike, others could not be recognized as brothers or sisters.

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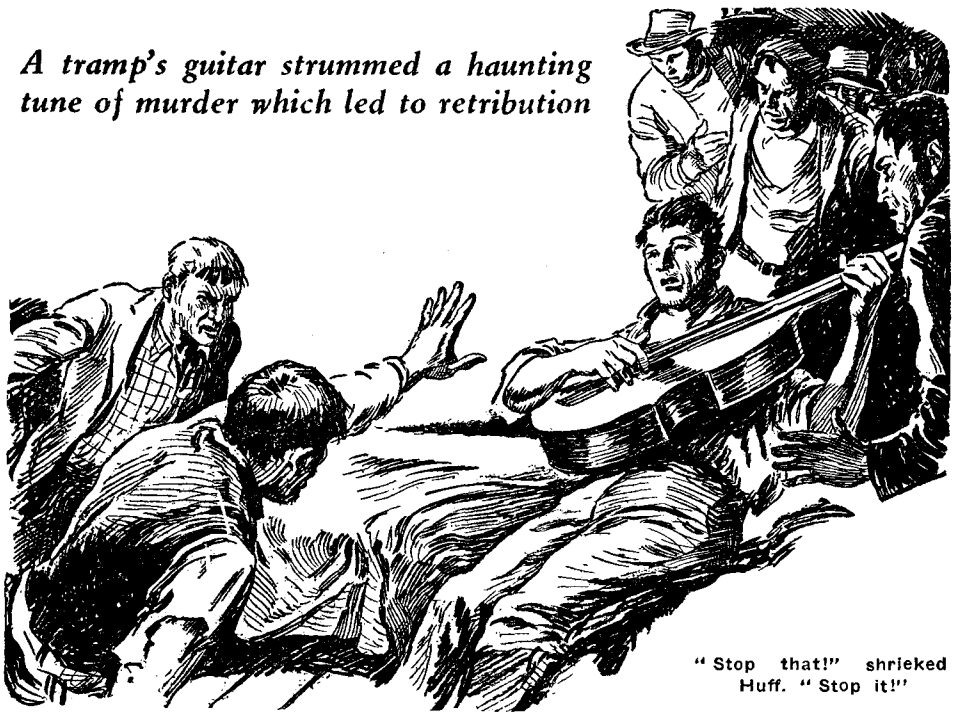
The Hounding Minstrel

By CHARLES HAVEN

A tramp's guitar strummed a haunting tune of murder which led to retribution



"Stop that!" shrieked Huff. "Stop it!"

FOR one month old John King, erstwhile insurance agent, had been a millionaire. The unprecedented land "boom" in Florida made his ten hundred thousand for him. When the bubble burst he found himself in possession of a few hundred dollars, an automobile, and a brand-new town that nobody lived in. Sylvan City, he called the town. It was miles inland from the lower east coast highway, and isolated. Florida was much over-built. Not a house in Sylvan City could be sold for enough to settle its tax levy.

But King would not give up this dream of his, and he lived there alone, a monarch among weeds, the saplings and vines of a new and swiftly growing jungle, ants and mosquitoes, lizards and gophers, salamanders and snakes. The world-wide depression came on, and the State had its quota of human derelicts. King took in a score of these, and worked out at least a temporary scheme of salvation for them and for himself.

There appeared in Sylvan City late one afternoon two men from Louisiana. The first to arrive was a stockily built brute of a fellow, unshaven and ragged. His name was Joe Huff. In spite of him, his manner was surly.

"I heard about you, Mr. King," he began. "I—I got to eat."

King, tall and gaunt and grizzled, sat in worn whites, barefoot, on a stool in the shaded main entrance of a faded and peeling stucco building that had been meant for the town hall. He was

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not favorably impressed with Huff. But the man was hungry, and King knew what hunger was.

"All right,'" he said. "Here's the way we run things. We take occasional trips to the beach sections for seashells, unhusked coconuts, thin lumber, paint, and the like. Here we carve the coconuts into Jiggs and Maggie faces, decorate the larger shells for ash receivers and pin trays, make small wooden boxes and veneer them with tiny coquina-clam shells of variegated colors. Everything is marked 'A Souvenir from Florida,' and sold to curio stores in Miami for tourists. This building is our workshop, and the building next door is our—er—barracks. We—"

Joe Huff had whipped around and was scowling at the other newcomer, a slim young fellow who also was ragged and unshaven.

"You know him, eh?" muttered King, guessing well. "Who is he?"

"They call him the Plaquemine Kid," growled Huff in undertones. "He's a bad one. He's half outlawed. He had to promise the judge—"

The Plaquemine Kid was very close now. King saw that he carried a battered guitar slung over one shoulder. This second stranger, too, was hungry. King took him on.

"You play that, eh?" said King, indicating the guitar. "I think the boys would like it, a lot. And you sing?"

"A little," was the drawled answer. "I know one fine song, in pa'ticklar. It's out o' the West."

He cut a dark eye toward Huff, who made a queer noise in his throat. Huff had gone pale. King noted it, and spoke again.

"Something between you two. What is it?"

"He's follered me," blurted Huff, "clean from Plaquemine. I go to a fishin' camp. He's there too. I find a little job in the groves. One hour, and he comes. Always with that damn guitar. I cain't—cain't lose him!"

The Kid's eyes were narrow and hard. King addressed him: "What was it you promised the judge?"

"So you had to tell that, did you, you big rat!" the peripatetic minstrel shot fiercely at Huff. In a lower voice, which was not quite steady: "Mr. King, I promised the judge I'd never carry a gun no more, and I ain't. I've kept my word."

The monarch of the "ghost" town shrugged. "I'll not pry into your affairs. But remember this: here you must keep the peace. And you work, or you don't eat. Supper will be ready very soon. Better wash up, eh?"

"I sure am much obliged to you," said the younger of the Plaqueminers, and the other said nothing.

IT was a motley but well-behaved derelict crew that gathered, after a coarse but substantial meal at sundown, in the "barracks" building. They sat here and there on their army-style cots, smoked, did almost no talking at all, and eyed frequently the slim young man from Louisiana. It was not necessary to ask the Kid to play and sing. He had a good, clear voice, which atoned in worthwhile measure for his more or less outlandish repertoire.

There was odd, reckless abandon in his countenance as he sang. The tune was so doleful that it was funny. And the words—

When I die, oh! bury me deep!
Tombstone at my head and feet!
Big white rose in my left hand—
On my way to the Promised Land!
On my wa-a-a-a-a-ay
To the Promised Land!

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Go tell mother to weep no more;
Tell her I jest went on before.
Big red rose in my right hand—
On my way to the Promised Land!
On my wa-a-a-a-a-a-ay
To the Promised Land!

All of them laughed and cheered. All, that is, except Joe Huff, who sat brooding, staring downward at nothing. Then the Plaquemine Kid launched upon an even more doleful thing. He sang and played this to, and at, Joe Huff, deliberately. It was that song out of the West, opened in the middle:

Let sixteen gamblers
Lay out my pore body;
Let ten brave sheriffs
Come bear me along!
Bear me to the graveyard
And throw the sod o'er me.
I'm only a lone cowboy,
And know I've done wrong!

He watched Huff as a hawk watches a rattler. Huff had gone ashen-white. His teeth were clenched, and his jaw muscles worked. Perspiration formed in large globules on his brow. King was there; he noted the bigger Plaqueminer's profound distress and wondered what tail end of drama, of tragedy, this pair had brought to Sylvan City. The singer's eye seemed merciless as he began another verse of that Western song:

Put bunches of flowers
All over my casket;
Flowers to deaden
The clods as they fall.
For only—

"Stop that!" shrieked Huff. "Stop it! Graveyards, tombstones, caskets! Don't you never think o' anything else, Kid?"

"No," quietly. "Not for a long time, Joe, I ain't thought o' anything else."

"Then for gosh sakes take it out on me some other way!"

"I reckon you've forgot somethin', Joe. Forgot that I promised old Judge Moreland I'd never carry another gun." The Kid jerked his head around and forced a smile for John King. "Here's Millwheel."

He sang it, strumming an accompaniment. Other songs followed. Until bedtime he entertained them, those human—very human—derelicts. Then he glanced meaningly toward Huff, and asked King to take charge of his guitar.

"I ain't slept none for two nights," he said wearily. "I'd like to sleep tonight."

King nodded. He understood. Joe Huff would avail himself of any chance to steal and destroy the instrument, which, it was evident, he hated. King took the guitar with him up to his room on the second floor. In this room he had an army-style cot like those below, a canvas chair, and a scarred mahogany desk, the latter-named a relic of the "boom."

The next day was Saturday, the day on which he was wont to make his weekly journey to Miami for the purpose of marketing souvenirs and bringing back supplies. The rear of his now ancient big car was soon well loaded with carved coconuts and shellwork. As was his custom, he took two men in the front seat with him, men who were to help in picking up shells along the beaches on the way back.

"Looks like rain," King observed, as they crossed a rotting bridge over a wide, hyacinth-choked canal that ran between Sylvan City and the east coast highway. "I know, it's said that only a fool or a stranger prophesies weather in Florida, but—"

"Last year it poured four solid days

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in January," one of his companions reminded him.

THEY had barely finished their deal with a curio shop on Flagler Street, when rain began to fall almost in sheets. King decided to forget about supplies for the time being, except for groceries. The land on either side of the canal was very low, and, if this deluge kept up, Sylvan City would be marooned within a very few hours. He drove the big, rattling car as fast as he could with safety. They found half a foot of water over the rotting canal bridge, and there was still no sign of the rain's slackening.

Before nightfall the raw materials were all worked up. The men had nothing to do. Again the Plaquemine Kid with his guitar and his singing became the chief attraction.

On this night, also, John King took the instrument with him when he went to his quarters upstairs. He placed the money he'd had left after having bought a week's supply of groceries—only a little more than thirty dollars, but to him and his men a fortune—in a drawer of his desk. Then he got out of his worn whites and into worn pajamas, extinguished the flame of the oil lamp, and went to bed.

Rain was still falling, and this, ordinarily, lulled him to sleep. But now sleep evaded him. It was not the weird persistent cries of a chuck-wills-widow, nor the incessant croaking of frogs, nor the infrequent distant bellowing of canal alligators that kept him awake. The difficulty, oddly or not, was that he couldn't drive the queer pair from Louisiana out of his thoughts. Plainly, the Kid was hounding Joe Huff, for some real or fancied reason, and it was a thing that displeased King.

Notwithstanding the fact that he was late going to sleep, he rose early. The downpour had ceased, but the dawn was bleak. He went to a window and peered through, smiled sadly at the weeds and vines and saplings that choked the main street of the town that had been his greatest dream. The scene was the more tragic in the dim, gray light.

He turned away frowning. Suddenly he realized that he was staring toward the desk drawer into which he had put the slightly more than thirty dollars. The drawer was open. Half a minute, and he had the truth. The money was gone!

King swore. Roundly he swore. The crashing of his fortunes had given him a lesser degree of perturbation. He had a thief in his crew, and it hurt. Always he had trusted them, and never before had he missed so much as a thin dime.

Then he remembered that he had two new men now, the Plaquemines, each of whom was as yet an untried, unknown quantity.

"Either Huff or that buck-wild Kid," he told himself, "is the damned thief."

Quickly he dressed himself, except for shoes, and went downstairs. Every man jack of those who occupied the orderly rows of cots along the walls was asleep, or feigning sleep so well that King was deceived. King bent over Joe Huff, seized one of his heavy shoulders and gave it a shake that brought the man sitting bolt upright in his none too tidy underwear.

"I'm asking you," began the monarch of Sylvan City, whispering, "to give up that money. Without it we've got nothing to buy raw materials with, and next week we'll have nothing to eat. Hustle!"

"What money?"

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Huff blinked. He was innocent, or his acting was superb, and in John King's opinion he was too bovine a man for superb acting.

"Keep quiet," whispered the grizzled, barefoot monarch.

AT once he walked over to the Kid and woke him, said to him the identical words he'd said to Huff. The slim young Plaqueminer stared at him out of narrowed dark eyes set in a perfect poker face, and did not open his mouth. Joe Huff disregarded King's order to keep quiet, and called boldly:

"Somebody stole your money, boss, eh? Well, if you think it was me, you can come and search my clothes, search my bed, search everything about me!"

That woke a dozen men. King ignored Huff, and again addressed the hounding minstrel.

"I hate to think you'd do that, son. But you act it and you look it."

There was a reply to this. It came in a rock-hard voice.

"Sure, I took the money. Anything which is done, why, I'm the guilty party. I'm used to that. Had to prove a alibi every week or so, back in Plaquemine."

Stumped, John King went up to his quarters and paced the floor, his bare feet making almost no sound at all. Soon a man known there as "Ohio" entered the room.

"I heard what Huff said, boss," apologetically muttered Ohio. "Why don't you search both of the new men?"

"Do you think," flared King, "that either of them would be fool enough to risk being caught with the money on him? Not a bit of it. That money is hidden somewhere, Ohio."

The gloomy Sunday morning dragged on. The Kid refused to play and sing, refused to talk, and at noon refused to eat. Joe Huff barely touched his food. King saw through this easily. The innocent one of the pair had had his feelings injured, and the guilty one was pretending that same thing.

About the middle of the sunless afternoon an unlettered, weatherbeaten thin rail of a man whom the rest of the crew called "Three Rivers" approached the minstrel with a difficult smile.

"Son, we air awful lonesome here, somehow, to-day. Ef you'll sing and play fer us, I got a purty fair old silverine watch I'll gi' you. Will you, son?"

There was a moment's hesitation. Then: "King's got my guitar. Bring it here. You can keep the watch, old-timer."

Three Rivers went happily for the instrument. The Kid sat up on his cot and sang and played this ancient doggerel:

Old Granny Hare,
Watche doin' there?
Settin' on a hillside,
Talkin' to a bear!
Talkin' 'bout weather,
Religion and sin;
Talkin' 'bout crops,
Politics and gin!

Granny, will yer dog bite.
Dog bite, dog bite?
No, child, no!
I done cut his head off,
Head off, head off,
I done cut his head off,
Long time ago!

Old Granny she lived
Down under the hill.
Put a cat in her stockin'
And sent it to mill.
The miller he swore
By the p'int o' his knife,
He never had ground
Sech a grist in his life!

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Granny, will yer dog bite,
Dog bite, dog bite?
No, child, no!
I done cut his head off,
Head off, head off,
I done cut his head off,
Long time ago!

He did away with his customary booming finish of chords and bass-string runs. There was a gleam in his eye as it sought the heavy, always brooding face of Joe Huff. Suddenly the Kid rose, walked over to a point near Huff and once more opened the song out of the West in the middle; he sang and played in strange, wild abandon and with tremendous verve—

Let sixteen gamblers
Lay out my pore body;
Let ten brave sheriffs
Come bear me along!
Bear me to the graveyard
And throw the sod o'er me.
I'm only a lone cowboy,
And know I've done wrong!

"You little devil!" yelled Huff, rising—"stop that damned thing!"

LIKE an echo there was the business-like voice of the Sylvan City monarch: "Why are you doing that, Kid? For some reason or other, it's torture to Huff, and you know it. I might add that it's anything but music to my own ears!"

"That so?" The young Plaqueminer tried to smile, and couldn't. "S'pose you ask Huff *why* it's torture to him. See if he tells you!"

Huff glared in the sheerest desperation. He was a big man physically, but his soul was the soul of a yellow rat, and he was ready to break. The Kid lifted his guitar, struck a chord with all fingers, and sang on:

Oh, play the fife lowly,
And beat the drum slowly!
Play the dead march—

Joe Huff cut in with a choking bellow, wheeled and ran. "I'll leave this blasted hole! I'll leave—"

The others didn't catch the rest of it. King rushed into the weedy, wet street after him, shouting: "Come back, Huff! The water is waist deep on the canal bridge now and all covered over thick with hyacinth—if you miss the bridge, you'll drop under the hyacinth and never get out; you'll be carried, dead, down to the sea!"

The fleeing man seemed not to hear. He ran at a shogging trot out the wet shell road that led to the coast highway. King followed him, and the others followed King. They reached the water's edge to see Huff pushing doggedly through the clogging hyacinth in the immediate vicinity of the bridge. The purple bloom brushed his armpits.

"To your left!" yelled King. "The bridge is to your left—*left!*"

Again Huff seemed not to hear. Then—he dropped out of sight in the canal, and the floating growth closed over him. Ohio quickly began wading toward the spot. King called him back. Not a man alive could even have located Joe Huff under that thick field of green and purple. There was a moment of bleak silence. It was broken by the erstwhile hounding minstrel.

"I reckon you'll say I'm 'sponsible, Mr. King. Mebbe I am. But I want to tell you somethin' before you pass judgment. Listen:

"Back in a Plaquemine lumber-camp there was a young feller from out o' the West, who played that same guitar and sang Western songs. We called him Texas Boy. Him and me was thicker'n brothers. Him and Huff hated each other like pizen. Huff shot him in the back—in the back, mind that!—through a window one night while he was singin' that same cowboy

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song; and that's why Joe couldn't bear to hear it, him bein' the weak coward he was! They arrested and tried him, but couldn't get any proof. But me, I knowed he done it. I runs him off with the song and follers him with it, tellin' him I'll let him alone if he'll 'fess up."

"I got a notion," drawled Three Rivers, "'at ef we could find the body we'd find yore missin' money, Mr. King."

"No," said the Kid. "Because I've got it!"

"You!" cried Three Rivers in amazement.

"Yes, me. Mr. King, you rickollect Joe Huff wanted hisself searched, don't you? Well, he knowed if you searched him you'd also search me too, and he'd planted that money on me! See why, don't you? Thought he'd be rid o' me and the guitar and the song at last, that's why. I didn't know what to do when I found it in my pocket, but—anyhow I'm comin' clean with you now, and you can do what you damn please about it, John King."

Looking the towering, barefoot monarch straight in the eye, he surrendered the slightly more than thirty dollars that meant so much to King and his derelict crew. He was no liar, and King knew it now.

"Want to stay here with us, or go back to Plaquemine?"

"Bein' as I cain't do nothin' more for Texas Boy," said the slim young man from Louisiana, "I reckon I'll stay here. Thank you, Mr. King. And I'll sing that Western song no more."

THE END

Sea-Going Skeletons

MYSTERIES of the sea have troubled mariners for centuries, but none have been more peculiar or puzzling than the cruise of the Scottish schooner Marlborough, manned by a crew of grinning skeletons.

On November 3, 1913, the British sailing ship Johnston, homeward bound, sighted what appeared to be a schooner with its sails floating in the wind, off the coast of Chile, near Punta Arenas. The commander of the Johnston signaled the strange craft, and when he could discern no response, he ordered his ship put about and approached the vessel.

As the two ships neared each other, the men on the Johnston observed that the masts and sails of the other craft were covered with some kind of green moss, and the vessel appeared to have been abandoned by its crew. Upon boarding it, the skeleton of a man was discovered beneath the helm. The deck was decayed to such an extent that it gave under the weight of the searchers. Three more skeletons were found near a panel, there were ten skeletons in the crew's quarters, and six more on the bridge. Upon the battered prow of the schooner the words "Marlborough, Glasgow," could still be made out.

The Marlborough, shipping records revealed, left Littleton, N. Z., in 1890 with a cargo of wool and a crew of twenty-three men under command of Captain Hird. There were also a few passengers and one woman. The ship disappeared near the tip of South America, and was not seen again until sighted twenty-three years later by the Johnston, although apparently it had been cruising, guided by skeleton hands, all that time. *G. R. Johnston.*

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The Men Who Make The Argosy

TOM CURRY

Author of "The Sacred Sword," etc.

WE'LL skip most of the facts about my early life, such as my birth in Hartford, Connecticut; living here and there while a boy; those years I spent at Columbia University, where I took a chemical engineering course. I began writing stories while still in school. Unfortunately, the first three sold, which made me an author. I'm really sorry to admit that.

My first real writing job was as a district reporter on the New York *American*, covering the Tenderloin district. Most police stories are small; but occasionally a big one breaks, for the first thing a detective or a cop does is to bring his prisoner to the nearest precinct station, fingerprint him while kicking him in the pants, book him, and enter him on the blotter.

There's always something doing around a station house. The drunks come in steadily on Saturday nights. Along Tenth and Eleventh Avenues in New York, it's customary to hang one's coat on a firebox while fighting, which sometimes sets off the alarm. That means more pinches. Wife-beaters, murderers, petty thieves and gangsters who are picked up in the company of their arsenals, come in. And not the least exciting part of a reporter's job is chasing detectives and trying to horn in firsthand on murders, fires and "collars"; and in attempting to get inside tips.

While thus enjoying myself—I'm really very shy—by interfering with people's most intimate affairs, asking outrageous questions and so on, I met several very famous New York detectives. They have been very kind to me; and from both observation and what they have told me, I have written and sold several hundred police detective stories.

I have spent some time in Bermuda, and about three years ago I decided to take a little trip down to South America, for a change and a rest. Far be it from me to pose as a tough old adventurer, but I did run into a nasty voyage. The ship I went on (my mistake!) was thirty years too old; she had been broken in half and sewed together again with a needle and thread—not very strong thread at that. Of course she listed badly. The company who owned her had bought two old wrecks in order to start a line to rival one already in existence and so force the established line to buy the new one out.

On the way down, off Hatteras in a seventy-mile northeast gale, the bilge pumps stopped up and we nearly sank. Then the stewards staged a little mutiny.

I now live in Connecticut. My chief diversions and adventures are found in tennis and fishing. Writing is a great life—though too often, I fear, I weaken and forget writing to go out on the hard court, or to lure the blackfish.

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

AGAIN an ARGOSY author gets the jump on science. Ralph Milne Farley, whose story "The Immortals" was concluded in last week's ARGOSY, writes us as follows:

Four years after the publication of my story, "The Radio Man," which featured a description of life on the planet Venus, leading astronomers promulgated the same theory. Now another of my fiction stories appears to have beaten science to it. This time, unfortunately for my claims of priority, they beat me to the actual publication date, although ARGOSY had long before purchased my story called "The Immortals," and had scheduled it for the earliest possible dates, late November and early December issues.

Waldemar Kaemffert, in the New York *Times*, for Sunday, August 19, 1934, announced the theory of Dr. S. Tolansky of the Imperial College of Science of London that there exist negative atomic nuclei as well as positive.

This is precisely the theory on which my story is based! Furthermore, he bases his theory on exactly the same ground that I did, namely, the discovery of the neutron, which has been postulated as constituting an atom of a new element, "neuton," occupying the zero position in the periodic table.

It was unfortunate but unavoidable that ARGOSY could not find a place for my story in earlier issues; but it is of interest to note that the manuscript was completed during the spring of 1934, and actually purchased by the editors of the magazine early in June. This was long before Dr. Tolansky's theory was made public through the press.

ARGOSY alienates a husband's affection:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

I should love to sue your ARGOSY for alienation of affection. When but a bride of a few weeks, I discovered my husband basking in the glory of an ARGOSY, and he's been basking ever since!—Well, I was a trifle skeptical at first as to the merits of ARGOSY as a woman's magazine, but lo! after one *Mme. Storey* tale I was converted. And since then have been shouting the magazine's praises to all my feminine friends.

I have a weakness for *Gillian Hazeltine* and *Vee*—also *Peter* and *Susan*. May the good ship ARGOSY never sink! MRS. E. B. THOMPSON.

NEAR the top:

Meadville, Pa.

For thirty-one years, during which time I have lived in the southern, the western and the eastern parts of the United States, I have with undiminished interest enjoyed reading each week the ARGOSY magazine. Though I shall not declare that the ARGOSY is the best magazine published, I do not hesitate to say that no other magazine can take its place, in my estimation.

Are
Readers
Getting
Outstanding
Stories?—
Yes!

JOHN J. STOCKHOLM.

A WORD of praise for an artist:

Maryville, Tenn.

I am surprised that I have seen in "Argonotes" no mention of the sketches of the main fiction characters which are now being scattered throughout the long stories. Your artist, Mr. Cahan, manages to get both character and variety in these small portraits, and his conception of how the character looks generally agrees with mine. When "Mori" left ARGOSY, I doubted whether you could get another artist as good, but Cahan even surpasses him. I don't believe the readers appreciate him enough.

You have introduced quite a few new writers in ARGOSY in the last year or two, and most of them are good. The only fault is that they gave us but a story or two and then stopped writing. I'm referring especially to George Owen Baxter, Evan Evans, Ernest Haycox and Ared White. How about giving us some more stories by these writers? MICHAEL FOGARIS.

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LOOKING AHEAD!

THE CASE OF THE KIDNAPED DUCHESS

John Solomon, famous old cockney sleuth, is back in London once more.—A captive yacht; a kidnaped British noblewoman; a forced marriage are the materials he works with. And as Solomon himself says of the Duchess, "She 'as the greatest lot o' emeralds in the world. An' to get 'em Sir Basil would commit murder a 'undred times over!" A novelette by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

IN THE NEXT ISSUE ——— One complete novel; two novelettes; three serials; short stories; and a brand new illustrated feature, "Wonders of the World."—*More* than your money's worth for 10c!

JADE BELLS

Treading a dangerous trail in San Francisco's sinister, glamorous Chinatown. A complete novel by a new author,

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Trapped in an ancient Peruvian mine. A new and different novelette by the author of the famous *Bellow Bill Williams* stories.

RALPH PERRY

AND—a new dog story by ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

ALL COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JANUARY 5

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BEWARE THE RUPTURE

THAT "DOESN'T BOTHER MUCH"

Suction-Cell Retainer is the newest invention for rupture. No bulk, no slipping. Holds and lets Nature heal, where possible.

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Yet...Holds Rupture!

An Ohio Scientist is now helping Nature rescue thousands of rupture victims. No more cruelty. No more cumbersome contraptions of ancient times. His new appliance works without embarrassing bulk, without leg straps or springs or bars or leather. You will be astonished at its tiny size, its revolutionary coolness and convenience. His test offer actually includes an extra appliance sent to you without a cent of extra cost. Mail coupon today for the most astounding rupture information you ever read. It is Free and will come in plain cover.

NOW rupture victims can abandon the needless pain and discomfort of many torturous trusses. Science has at last developed a tiny, comfortable appliance of tremendous interest for every rupture sufferer. This device is called "New Science Retainer." It has been developed and perfected as a result of having made more than a million rupture appliances. With it comes an astounding natural help for putting real strength into the abdomen, so as to aid Nature in preventing recurrence of rupture.

Results with New Science Retainer are often so remarkable, so quick, so simple that you, too, may marvel. It has no leg straps. Its unique pad expands and contracts as easily as your own flesh. When you walk, run, bend, or exercise it tends to squeeze itself, not the part of your body it rests against. It is so entirely lacking in bulk and weight that even some ruptured men's wives have not known about it.

PERSONAL GUARANTY

New Science Retainer must give the results that you expect or you simply return it. If your rupture is not actually and positively reduced in size during the free trial we allow, send it back and demand the return of your deposit as agreed. If 30 days' trial are not enough, write us and we will extend the time to 60, 90 days or even four months if you desire.

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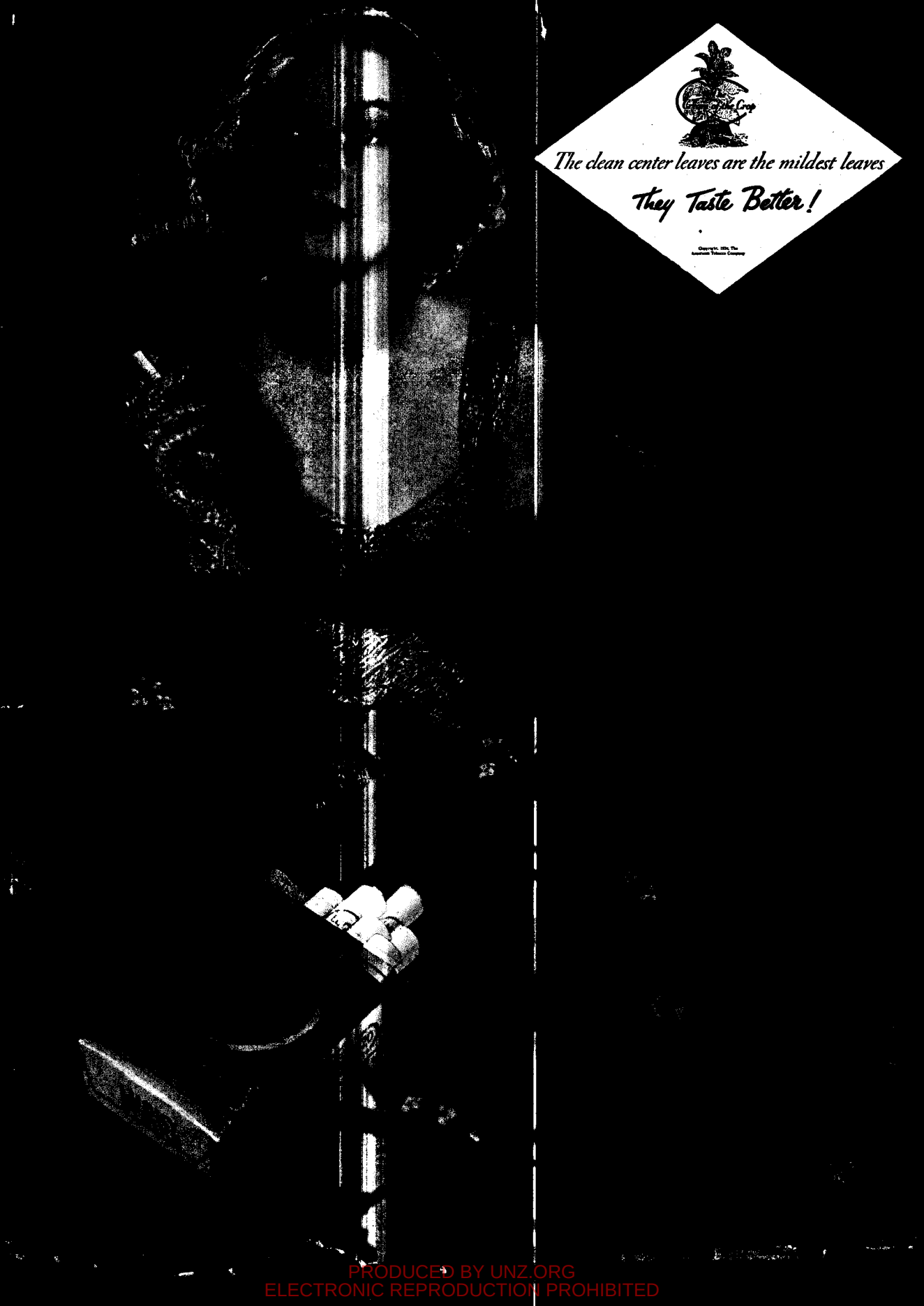

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